


*Through the Bible
Day by Day*

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

F.B. Meyer



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ISAIAH. Isaiah 6: 8, 9.

From Painting by JOHN S. SARGENT.
Modern American Artist.

Through the Bible Day by Day

A Devotional Commentary

BY

REV. F. B. MEYER

Arranged for Daily Reading, with Book Introductions,
Outlines and Review Questions

Illustrated from Paintings by Modern Artists

VOLUME IV

EZRA TO MALACHI

PHILADELPHIA
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INTRODUCTION

THERE is need everywhere for the cultivation of the habit of reading some portion of God's Word *each day*. Such reading should be *consecutive*, for only thus can continuous interest be maintained. It may also be greatly helped by an *interpreter*, who will explain what is obscure as well as suggest applications of the message to the daily life.

To meet such need this series of seven volumes provides an arrangement of the books of the Bible in daily portions, with concise devotional comments. It includes all portions of the Bible most suitable for daily reading, either individually or in family groups.

As a *commentary on the whole Bible*, these volumes will be found valuable because they omit points of merely scholarly interest and fix attention upon the central message of each passage and its application to daily needs. There are frequent references to other parts of Scripture, especially from Old Testament truths to their New Testament fulfilment and interpretation.

Mr. Meyer's life-long experience in interpreting the Bible to the common people makes him pre-eminently fitted for this service—a crowning one in his world-wide ministry by voice and pen.

Introductions and outlines are provided for each Bible book. Review questions have been added at appropriate points, to enable readers to sum up and better preserve in memory what they have learned. The illustrations, selected from paintings of Bible scenes by modern artists, aid in the interpretation of the passages which they portray.

It is hoped that these volumes will prove of much value to Sunday-school teachers and adult scholars; will promote profitable Bible reading in connection with both family and private devotions; and will everywhere deepen a love for and an intelligent acquaintance with the one Book which can provide a fresh and helpful message for the needs of each new day.

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DAILY READING OF GOD'S WORD

The Bible is full of God's wisdom. It is the Word of God. We must read it not only with our head, but with our heart. An analysis of its contents is good and desirable; but when all this is done, we need to allow time for the inner wisdom, power and grace which are stored in the Book, to soak into our inner consciousness. Therefore, for some reasons, it is better to have a shorter portion for daily study, to give us time to get all the juice and marrow out of what we read.

This is the method followed in this system. Busy people, students, commercial men, Sunday-school workers and older scholars, soldiers and sailors, people on the hills and on the prairies, living on the edge of the great tides of human activity, will find these passages, selected for daily reading, ample to furnish a daily meal of truth, and yet deep and wide enough for profound inquiry and interest.

It has always seemed to me that the true way to know the Bible is to read it through. It is only so that we can follow the unveiling of the divine purpose, from the Dawn of Genesis to the Perfect Day of the divine writings of John. It is only so that we can obtain a connected view of the wide scope of Revelation. To read in different, unconnected passages, now of Poetry, now of History, now of Doctrine, prevents the mind from getting proper focus. We are apt by that method to concentrate on a few familiar passages, instead of listening to all that God has spoken to men's hearts. There is, probably, nothing more vital to an accurate knowledge of the Bible than the good

old practice of reading it thoughtfully and steadily through with such brief notes as this volume provides.

But let it always be remembered that the profoundest knowledge of the Word comes from the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit. Ask him to unlock and unfold its sacred mysteries. Ask him to reveal the glories of our Lord in every chapter. Ask him to enable you to "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest." Ask him, finally, to enable you to become not a forgetful hearer or reader, but a doer of the Word. See to it that your reading is combined with the faith that claims of God the fulfilment, in your own experience, of all he has promised. No prayer, therefore, is more salutary, as you open your Bible, morning by morning, than the familiar old words of the psalmist: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

F. B. MEYER.

THE BOOKS OF EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND
ESTHER

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OUTLINE OF EZRA

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INTRODUCTIONS

THE BOOK OF EZRA

Ezra was a Jew, sprung from the race of Aaron, and descended from the high priest who was slain at the capture of Jerusalem, 2 Kings 25: 18-21. This book is not a continuous narrative, but consists of two parts separated by several years. The first part, chapters 1—6, contains a narrative of the return of the first caravan of Jews from Babylon, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The second part, chapters 7—10, is an account of an expedition, sixty years after the first, conducted by Ezra himself, accompanied by large numbers of his fellow-countrymen, and empowered to re-establish order and religion.

This book is supposed to have been written by Ezra, who was a great student of the holy writings, and a ready scribe in the Law of Moses. He must have been a man of note among the Jewish captives to have won the favor and trust of the king of Persia. There is an absence of the miraculous, and a great similarity to the books of Chronicles. It shows enthusiasm characterising the beginnings of work for God; then coldness and apathy follow in face of opposition; but when men get back to foundation principles, the work is carried forward to completion.

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

Ezra continued his labors in Jerusalem for some twelve years after the events recorded in his narrative, and actively co-operated with Nehemiah, to whose history we now

turn. Indeed, though this book was largely written by him whose name it bears, certain portions of it were probably written by the ready scribe, Ezra, who spent the closing years of his life in collecting the sacred books into one volume, and completing the canon of Scripture. Nehemiah was born in exile. In early life he was exposed to great temptation, although the appointment which he held in the Persian court was an honorable one. But he remained faithful, devout, simple-hearted, patriotic, and godly; he was evidently valued by the heathen monarch as a good and faithful servant—"an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile."

He arrived at Jerusalem thirteen years after Ezra, with the rank of governor of the province, and with full authority to rebuild the walls, which, notwithstanding the erection of the Temple, still lay waste. His administration lasted some thirty-six years. The secret of his efficiency lay in his constant bringing of all the problems before God, and of this habit we shall have abundant evidence as we proceed. The book abounds in expressions of his sincerity. Nehemiah was a simple-hearted man, characterized chiefly by humility and purity of motive, and revealing the mighty power that can be exerted by one who has no purpose in life and no power that is not centered in God.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

This book is a striking record of the divine providence. In the foregoing books we learn how God watched over the Jews who returned from captivity. This tells us how those who remained still in exile, scattered through the great heathen world, were marvelously preserved. Though the name of God does not occur in this book, yet his hand is

everywhere manifest. His name does not often occur in the daily press, which records the history of our times; yet we may ask whether the workings of God are not also clearly recorded there. Verily our God hides himself.

The time occupied by this story falls between the going-up of Zerubbabel from Babylon to Jerusalem, and that of Ezra. The Persian empire was at the height of its glory, extending from the Indus to the Mediterranean. It is supposed that the Ahasuerus here mentioned was Xerxes, the invader of Greece. The feast in chapter 1 corresponds in point of time to the great council he summoned to decide on that invasion. His winter palace was at Shushan, and his court given up to revelry and excess. It is held by some that the book is an extract from the imperial records of the time, and was perhaps drawn up by some pious Jew, Mordecai or another, who was annalist at that time; and if this were the case, it would account for many parentheses and explanations which are inserted, which would not have been required by ordinary Jewish readers.

THROUGH THE BIBLE DAY BY DAY

THE BOOK OF EZRA

1. God's Promises Fulfilled.

Ezra 1. God will ever be mindful of his covenant. There were also many remembrancers as Daniel and other like-minded exiles who gave him no rest and were ever asking him for David's sake to bring his people from captivity. See Isa. 62: 6, 7. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, v. 1, and the spirits of the people, v. 5. How clearly the minds of men are subject to his promptings! May we never be disobedient to the heavenly visions that visit us, but always on the alert to work out with fear and trembling whatsoever He may work in. Whenever we yield to the divine promptings, it is remarkable how everything seems to co-operate with us. The stars in their courses fight for us. All things serve the man who serves Christ. In the present instance, all that were round about strengthened their hands. Cyrus brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which had been in safe-keeping during those years of anarchy and confusion, like the precious manuscripts of Scripture during the middle ages. But when they were needed, God brought them out of their hiding-place. Trust in him; he makes no mistakes.

2. The Building of the Altar.

Ezra 2: 61—3: 7. Throughout their history the true Israelites were eager to maintain their genealogy; wherever they were scattered, they carefully guarded their national registers. Each of us should be able to establish his descent and to vindicate his claim to be considered a child of God, a joint-heir with Christ, a partaker in the

inheritance which God has promised to them that love him. If you cannot establish your sonship, you may doubt your right to the spiritual blessings which are a part of the family estates. This is clearly illustrated by the prohibition issued against the eating of the most holy things by the priests whose names were not found in the register. They must wait till the Urim and Thummin attested that they were Israelites indeed. What that witness was in these olden days, the testimony of the Holy Spirit is within us. He witnesses with our spirit that we are born of God.

The first act of the restored Jews was to set up the House of God. For this they gave willingly, and after their ability. The altar was the center of their religion. So the Cross of Jesus is the center of our life and worship, reminding us of his work for us in justification, or his claims in sanctification.

3. The Foundation of the Temple Laid.

Ezra 3:8-13. Foundation-laying is not always pleasant work. It means toil under ground, down in the trenches, unnoticed and unknown, and those who begin are often not permitted to finish. But amid all, the minstrel Hope brought her harp, and sang her sweet strains of encouragement. In spite of the fewness and poverty of the builders, the voice of Inspiration had assured them that the glory of the latter house should surpass that of the former. So by the reckoning of faith, in sure anticipation that God would keep his word, the builders encircled their foundations with their songs. But the same event excited tears and shoutings. The old men looked back, and as they contrasted the impoverished and diminished condition of their people with the opulent crowds that had thronged the courts of Solomon's Temple, they could not restrain their tears. The young, new generation had not the same retrospect or ideals and, filled with hope of that which was to be, they could not restrain their shouts, which were heard afar off. "We *have* been," said the graybeards, "and

the good old times were better than these." "We *shall* be," said the young, "and we will make the coming days better than any that have been since the beginning of the world!"

4. The Building of the Temple Opposed.

Ezra 4:1-10. So long as you lead a languid and un-aggressive life, the enemy will leave you alone, but directly you begin to build God's temple, you may count on his strenuous opposition. When we are permitted to go on from day to day without much temptation, we may fear that we are doing little to destroy evil and construct good. But the virulent hate of the wicked one is a comfortable sign that his kingdom is suffering serious damage. Let us so live that we may give the devil good reason to fear and hate us. There is a stronger than he. We must beware of the proposal to join in with the ungodly. Their arguments may sound very fair and appeal to a false liberality of sentiment, but the golden cup contains poison, and beneath the kiss is the traitor's hand. This is why so many fair enterprises have miscarried. They have seemed to afford common ground for co-operation with the false and counterfeit Israel, but they have ended in disillusion and disappointment. Though the Jews excited the intense hatred and opposition of their would-be helpers, their policy of exclusiveness was amply justified by the result. The old proverb reminds us that we must never trust our enemies when they offer blandishments and gifts.

5. The Enemy's Short-Lived Triumph.

Ezra 4:11-24. The promoters of this letter were descendants of the heathen colonists who had been sent into the land by the Assyrians, 2 Kings 17:24. It was written to the then reigning monarch, Artaxerxes, which Ezra seems to have copied from the records of Persia, because it stands in the original in the Chaldee language. Notice that now the Israelites are first called Jews, i. e., Judahites, v. 12. They urge that the Temple-building

should be stayed for the king's own sake. Secret enmity to God's kingdom is often hidden under pretended devotion to Caesar, John 19:12. We, too, have our maintenance from the God of heaven, we have eaten the salt of the palace, v. 14; and we should never allow his name to be dishonored without doing our best to prevent it. The king was imposed upon by their representations, and ordered the work to cease. But it is probable that something was due to the supineness of the Jews, who were already half-hearted in their endeavors, Hag. 1:2-9. The rebuilding of the Temple stopped during the reigns of Cambyses and the Magia Smerdis; but in the second year of Darius Hystaspes it was recommenced, and was then finished in four years, or nineteen years after its commencement, Zech. 8:9; Hag. 2:18.

6. The Mission of Haggai and Zechariah.

Ezra 5. It is necessary to read the books of Haggai and Zechariah to see what difficulties the leaders of the people had to meet, and how much they needed the help of the prophets. At last matters were brought to an issue by the failure of the crops, which gave the prophets additional arguments. When God's judgments are abroad in the earth, men learn righteousness. As soon as the rebuilding began after a lapse of fifteen years, another letter was sent to the metropolis for advice. Tatnai appears to have been incited by the Samaritans, and he made a visit of personal inspection. His account of the proceedings is very graphic. The eye of God is on those whose hearts are perfect towards him, v. 5; 2 Chron. 16:9; Ps. 33:18. It is very well to imitate these elders in giving an answer in meekness and fear, but not terrified by our adversaries, 1 Pet. 3:12, 15. If God has clearly set us to do work for him, let us go through with it in spite of all human opposition. Storms are the methods by which he reveals our weakness and his all-sufficiency. The walls of the spiritual temple are built "in troublous times," but the work goeth fast on. The rulers of this world cannot understand and

gnash impotently with their teeth. God's plan shall stand, though earth be in arms to resist it.

7. Prospered in a Difficult Work.

Ezra 6. How much depended on the finding of that roll! But God knew where it was, and led them to discover it, and inclined Darius to ratify it. When we are anxious and troubled about our relations to our fellow-men, we do little by worrying, we do much by trusting. Missing documents, alien hearts, tangled skeins, all yield before the hand of our Father working for us. The difficulty raised by their foes really reacted for the benefit of the Jews, for the king decreed that their expenses should be met, and their needs supplied. When we are living upon God's plan and need material resources for his work, he will see that they are forthcoming from the most unlikely sources, and the revenues of heathen monarchs shall be laid under contribution. When the house was finished it was dedicated, v. 16. What joy was there! but amid all a solemn memory of the sin of the whole people of Israel. Though scattered to the four winds, they could not forget that in God's sight they were one still. It is highly probable that Psalms 146-150 were composed at this time. In the Septuagint they are called the Psalms of Haggai. Burnt offering and song go together, 2 Chron. 29: 27. After the dedication, the Passover. Separation must ever precede our feasting on God's Paschal Lamb, and out of this state of heart, influences proceed which produce the true unity and drawing together of the children of God.

8. A Missionary Journey.

Ezra 7: 1-18. An interval of sixty years intervened between the events of chapters 6 and 7, and in that time the history recorded in the book of Esther took place. This chapter is full of helpful thoughts. Note the description of Ezra's character—*A ready scribe*—v. 6. He not only knew the Law, but he set his heart to seek and do, v. 10. The only way to understand Scripture is

to be prepared to do it. What a contrast to Matthew 23: 3! Let us not resemble the finger-post, which directs the traveler, but stirs not a step along the road it points. Note the secret of Ezra's success, *the good hand of God*. This is a characteristic phrase of Ezra and Nehemiah. That hand answers prayer, v. 6; speeds our way, as much in railway trains as in caravans, v. 9; and strengthens us for service, v. 28. The strong, tender hand of God is laid on our hands, as a father's on those of the son learning to draw a bow, Gen. 49: 24. And when God's hand is on us, it is also on others, preparing them to co-operate. When God needs an instrument, he will come to men of Ezra's spirit.

9. A King's Bounty.

Ezra 7: 19-28. Ezra's commission was very ample. Those who officiated or assisted in Temple service were exonerated from taxation. Full permission was given to take all voluntary gifts of money. Orders were issued for the supply of food and other necessities. He was also appointed governor of all Jews west of the Euphrates. The royal bounty was very generous. Here was the harvest of Daniel's prayers and tears. God did exceeding abundantly unto his people beyond all that they had asked or thought. Notice how Ezra's love for God's law impressed Artaxerxes with the conviction that it was perfect. He commanded that the will of God should be the supreme court of reference to Ezra and his brethren in the disposal of the free-will offerings. He further enjoined that they should do exactly the commands of the God of heaven, and ordained that all who refused should be punished. So great was his respect for the Law, that he left Ezra to do very much as he thought best. This reverence on the part of a heathen monarch for God's law shames us. Let us make more of it ourselves! Let us be people of the Book, and exalt it as we are exalted by it, in the judgment even of those who do not revere it!

10. United Prayer for Guidance.

Ezra 8:1-23. The number of men who accompanied Ezra amounted to 1754, but the women and children would bring up the gross total to about 7000. The lack of Levites was very serious. These should have been among the very first. A deputation was therefore sent to a neighboring seminary or college, where they were being trained, and here again is the mention of *the good hand of God*. Sometimes hearts are ready and waiting for service, which need just a word or appeal to complete their plans. There is always special interest in this paragraph for those who are venturing forth on the untried and unknown. The camp at Ahava; the sending for the priests; the waiting for their coming; the recognition of God's good hand in sending a man of discretion; and then the fast and prayer for protection. We can almost see the little band on the point of plunging into the inhospitable and dangerous desert, spending hours in prayer, and restrained from requesting an escort, lest they might invalidate their leader's trustful boast. How careful we should be to do nothing inconsistent with the proud position that faith gives us in the keeping power of God! Seek him, O soul of mine, and he will be found, and his hand shall be upon thee for good.

11. Thanksgiving for Safety and Success.

Ezra 8:24-36. Into our hands also is committed first the rich treasure and solemn trust of our own souls, and next the great deposit of the gospel; 1 Tim. 1:11; 6:20. In order to fulfil this sacred charge there must be purity, "Ye are holy"; and sleepless vigilance, "Watch ye." There were ambushes and designs on their safety, but the foe was unable to break through the divine environment, v. 31. How safe are we who live in God! What joy as the little band weighed the vessels, and rendered up their charge, Luke 19:16. Is not this a picture of our entrance into heaven, when we also shall acknowledge the good hand of the Lord, and sacrifice our

burnt offerings of thanksgiving? This incident is no exception. Similar care will be surely and blessedly experienced by all those who trust under the shadow of God's wing. It is credibly affirmed that, in the American Civil War, none of the Quakers, who of course were non-resisters, suffered any damage from the troops of either side. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." Let those who fast and pray for God's help be sure to return him thanks when it has been given.

12. A Leader's Sorrows for His People's Sins.

Ezra 9. The mingling of the holy seed with heathen peoples was always the curse of Israel, and it has been the temptation of God's children in every age. Do we sufficiently tremble at the words of the God of Israel because of our sins or those of others? The humiliation and anguish of soul experienced by Ezra and his associates are a great rebuke to us. We are indignant, but we do not view sin from God's standpoint. Notice the humility of his prayer, *I blush to lift up my face*; its vicarious confession of sin; its acknowledgment of God's grace in giving a little reviving; its recital of the aggravation which had dyed their sin of a deeper hue. Israel was intended to live in Canaan as a separated people. The land itself could not yield its good, or remain their permanent inheritance on condition of their fidelity to God. When confession of sin has been made, let us stand before God claiming forgiveness, acceptance, and cleansing, through the precious blood of Christ, 1 John 1:7.

13. Putting Away Strange Marriages.

Ezra 10:1-19. The people seem to have been more impressed by Ezra's intense grief of soul than they could have been by his severest condemnation. Is not this the secret of winning men from their evil ways? But we must not expend all our force in tears; we must act when we have opportunity. Shechaniah was not im-

plicated, but his father and other near relatives were, v. 26. His words may be appropriated by us all, v. 2. There is always hope for the man who repents and puts away evil. It is a great encouragement when brave men will stand by the reformer, but whether they do or not, there is One who neither leaves nor forsakes, Heb. 13: 5, 6. A drastic remedy was required; it seemed very hard and must have occasioned many heartbreaks. Probably if a wife had truly turned to the God of Israel, she would have been retained. God demands the sacrifice of anything which comes between us and him, however dear, Mark 9: 43; Matt. 10: 37. There is no warrant for such action in our days. The process of the Gospel is given in 1 Cor. 7: 12, 13. A solemn assembly was convened in the month of December, the coldest and rainiest time of the year. A court of inquiry was finally appointed, who continued their labors for about a quarter of a year. The offense seems to have been temporarily eradicated, though we meet with it again, Neh. 13: 23; Mal. 2: 11. Each generation repeats the sins of its predecessors, unwarned by their bitter experiences. Not the study of history, but the Spirit of God is needed to deal with and subdue individual and national sins.

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON EZRA

OUTLINE.

- (a) What are the two main divisions of this book?
- (b) How do the two returns resemble each other, as indicated in the outline?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) What is known regarding the author of this book?
- (d) With what other books in the Old Testament may it be compared?
- (e) What does the book teach?

SECTIONS 1—13. CHAPTERS 1—10.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. What heathen king was prompted by God to aid in the rebuilding of the Temple?
2. What was the first act of the restored Jews?
3. What two emotions blended at the Temple's refounding? Why did some weep?
4. By whom was the building of the Temple opposed?
5. What was given as a reason why the work should be stopped?
6. What two prophets urged the people to resume building? How many years had the work been suspended?
7. What heathen ruler was in power when the Temple was finished, and what aid did he give towards its completion?
8. In what words, constantly repeated, may be found the keynote to Ezra's life?
9. What commission did the king of Babylon give to Ezra?
10. How was Ezra's belief in the power of prayer manifested? Why was he ashamed to ask for a military escort?
11. What sacred charge was given certain of the priests and Levites?
12. What lesson may the individual Christian learn from Ezra's attitude toward national sins?
13. How did the people show their repentance?

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

1. A Patriot's Prayer.

Nehemiah 1. Though living in luxury, in the winter palace of the Persian kings, Nehemiah's heart was keenly sensitive to all that affected his people. But he turned from tears to prayer, from man to God. Oh, that we could cry and sigh for the rents and breaches in the Church of God. We should deal much more successfully with men, if, like Nehemiah, we dealt more largely with God. Gordon used to say that he had met and conquered his enemies before he saw them. This prayer of Nehemiah's is very beautiful, saturated as it is with quotations from Scripture, and so effective with God, because based on his own Word. It was steeped in tears of contrition for sin, and offered without ceasing *day and night*. Nor was it solitary, for there seems to have been a little band of others united with him, v. 11. Lord, teach us to pray thus, till others are found kneeling with us. Here is a good petition for us as we go forth to our daily calling, in which so much depends on the attitude of our fellow-men. *Prosper thy servant this day and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.*

2. A Patriot's Self-Sacrifice.

Nehemiah 2:1-11. The seventh month answers to our March or April, so that four months had passed since Nehemiah had set himself to special prayer. Between the king's second question and Nehemiah's answer, the simple-hearted cup-bearer found time to pray to the God of heaven. Then, with the assurance that God was with him, he did not scruple to ask great things: that he might be sent to the city of his fathers to build it, and that he might receive all the materials necessary for its construction. But he is careful to record that his requests were granted, not by the clemency of the king,

but according to the good hand of God. Do we recognize that good hand enough? We get glimpses here into the inner workings of this man's heart. He felt that God had put his holy purpose there. He did not hesitate to confess this to the Jews and amid the opposition and scorn of their foes, he strengthened himself in his God, sure that he would not have brought him so far to put him to shame. Be sure you are on God's side, and nothing will be impossible to you.

3. Braving Ridicule and Treachery.

Nehemiah 2: 12-20; 4: 1-12. Suspicion, 2: 12-20. Sanballat was probably a Moabite, a native of Horonaim; Tobiah had been a slave. There are many descendants of these two men in all our Christian communities today, hindering God's work. This heroic soul met their scorn and the depression of the people by unwavering faith and calm confidence in the good hand of God, v. 18. How small do our difficulties seem when brought into the sight of the God of heaven! *Reproach, 4: 1-6.* Whenever God's work revives, there is sure to be evil-speaking and reproach. It is a mistake to reply. Let us hand over our cause to God, and go on with his work. It matters very little what men say, as long as *he* is pleased. Had Nehemiah had the message of Christ he would not have prayed as in v. 5. Our Lord taught us to intercede for our enemies, Matt. 5: 44. But let us emulate Nehemiah's zeal for the name of God, and let us remember that increased light means increased responsibility, Matt. 11: 11. *Active opposition, vs. 7-12.* In time of hostility, our friends and allies are apt to grow discouraged and to advise the suspension of our work. "We are not able"; but faith looks to God alone and triumphantly holds on its way.

4. The Triumph of Courage and Devotion.

Nehemiah 4: 13-23. The work of rebuilding the ruins of Zion is typical of our efforts as Christians to counteract the deterioration which is ever at work in our own



THE REBUILDING OF THE WALLS. Nehemiah 4: 16-18.

From Painting by JOSEPH VON FÜHRICH. Modern Austrian Artist.

hearts, in the professing Church, and in society. No one who attempts this work will escape hostility, covert or manifested. That is a suggestive attitude pictured here; the girded sword, the spear in one hand, and the trowel in the other. So they wrought, with ear intent for the trumpet sound, ready for any emergency, and yet sure that God would fight for them. All the people of God should make common cause against a common foe. We stand or fall together, v. 20. Our hands must be familiar with the sword against the attack of our spiritual enemies, and with the trowel to contribute our bit of work towards God's building.

5. Securing Justice for the Poor.

Nehemiah 5. The prospects of the poor people among the returned exiles were deplorable. There had been deficient rains and poor harvests, Hag. 1: 6-11. They had mortgaged their lands to their richer brethren, and had even sold their children to pay the royal taxes and procure means of subsistence. The rich had taken advantage of their necessities, oppressing them with grievous exactions and heavy usury. When Nehemiah heard of it, he seems to have withstood the wrong with strenuous protest, depending on his God for support. And, in a great assembly, he carried the day against selfishness and greed. There is nothing here to condemn mortgage or interest in themselves. Each is a legitimate method of trade, except when undue advantage is taken of a brother's necessities. The vs. 14-19 were evidently added at a subsequent period to the rest of the chapter, and relate the habits of Nehemiah's administration. How full is this book of ejaculatory prayer! Even from his writing-table, this true-hearted man would lift up his eyes to God.

6. A Great Task—A Safeguard from Danger.

Nehemiah 6. How often Satan tries to call us off from our work for God! He cannot endure to see us engaged so eagerly on our Master's business and there-

fore raises up all sorts of hindrances and hostilities. Amid all these we have but one duty to perform. We must lose ourselves in our work. Ours to reply, "I am doing a great work, I cannot come down; why should the work cease?" If we will see to God's business, he will see to our safety. False friends, who prophesy in God's name, are more to be dreaded than open foes. We must learn to discern the spirits. The counsel which savors of self is always to be suspected. Note that Nehemiah considered that to have fear would have been to sin. But God was with the little band through dangers, and the wall was finished in spite of all opposition. 1 Cor. 15: 58.

7. Public-spirited Citizens.

Nehemiah 7: 1-8, 36-73. It is probable that Nehemiah returned to the Persian court on the completion of the first part of his enterprise, the building of the walls, and that he left Hananiah and his brother in charge until he had been able to obtain a prolongation of his mission. Hananiah's character is very aptly described in v. 2. These are splendid characteristics—the fear of God and faithfulness, 1 Cor. 4: 2. Sound common sense, through which God wrought, dictated the policy of appointing each man to guard his own property, vs. 3, 5. The extent of the city walls had evidently been marked out in faith, as directed in Zechariah 8. Registration seems to have engrossed much of the care of these returned exiles, and it was necessary, not only that each might inherit his ancestral property, but that the descent of our Lord might be easily traced to David. We ought to be very sure that we and our dear ones are included in God's register. We cannot lay claim to our inheritance, unless we are heirs through the new birth, Rom. 8: 16, 17.

8. New Light from God's Law.

Nehemiah 8. Surely this was the first public Bible-reading! When will the people be again as hungry for

the Word of God as these Jews who stood in the open space from early dawn till the scorching noon? What reverence for the Word! *When Ezra opened the Book, all the people stood up.* What holy worship! *When he blessed the great God, all the people answered, Amen, amen!* What a model to us all! *They gave the sense, so that they understood.* What searching of heart! *The people wept when they heard the words of the law.*

There is nothing which weakens us so much as does unrestrained remorse. Contriteness of heart is wholesome and helpful, but excessive grief incapacitates us for our duties. It is well therefore to cultivate holy joy; the joy of sin forgiven, of acceptance with God, of hope that anchors us to the unseen, and that cannot be ashamed. You may not be able to joy in yourself or your surroundings, but you may always rejoice in the Lord.

9. God's Hand in History.

Nehemiah 9:1-21. What a blessed result of the Bible-study of the previous chapter. It led to confession, separation from evil association and worship. It is good to review the dealings of God with us and with our people in bygone days. There are hilltops in our experience where the air is clear, and we can see the way by which we have been led. At such times we look beyond second causes to the great Orderer of our lives, and our history is one perpetual assertion of *THOU*. The history of God's dealings with Israel is an epitome of his dealings with ourselves. The choice in Ur, the redemption from Egypt, the wilderness wanderings, the land of rest—all these have their counterparts in our life-story. Side by side with the story of God's care runs the story of transgression, vs. 16-18. The gold and black strands are closely interwoven. In the midst of God's best gifts, we break out into sin; yet he still gives us his good spirit, and withholds not the manna which he promised, v. 20.

10. The Penalty of Ingratitude and Disobedience.

Nehemiah 9:22-38. The theme of this prayer is the covenant mercy of God. However great the provocation of the Chosen People, he never swerved from his ancient promise to their fathers. He testified against them by his Spirit and chastened them for their sins. He allowed them to be oppressed by their enemies and carried into captivity. But when they returned and cried for his help they found his manifold mercies waiting to welcome, forgive, and restore them. They were conscious that there was nothing in themselves or even in their fathers to explain these wonderful dealings, and the secret had ever to be found in *his great mercies*. In this hour of distress, they turned back to him and bound themselves by a faithful covenant. But, alas, even written promises will not hold the wayward heart of man. What a picture this is of our own lives, and how often have all these experiences been repeated in us! Fortunately for us we are represented now, not by our promises and prayers, but by Jesus Christ, in whom we stand and are accepted and kept.

11. A Pledge of Better Service.

Nehemiah 10:28-39. The chapter opens with a list of the signers of the covenant, which was signed on behalf of the people. The consecration covenant involved—first, obedience; then, the purity of the holy seed from intermarriage with heathen peoples; next, the observance of the Sabbath, and of the Sabbatic year. In addition there was the yearly charge for the maintenance of divine worship. The great lack among Christian people is system in the apportioning of their incomes. They leave their giving to impulse, and thus often give the merest fraction of their possessions to the cause of God. We should at least give a tenth, and as much more as we can afford. If only all who read these words would resolve to imitate these impoverished exiles, and to set aside the tithe of all they earn or

receive, they would discover the luxury of giving, and a new zest in receiving. The first-fruits of increased wages and revenue should also be given to God, as a tribute of thanksgiving. Let the first produce of hen-roost, orchard, and field be his. Do not neglect or forsake God's house, v. 39.

12. Neglect of Religious Duties.

Nehemiah 12:44—13:14. In vs. 44-47 we have recorded the care that was manifested for the worthy maintenance of those who ministered in sacred things. As a result there were glad outbursts of minstrelsy and holy joy. Make room in your life for songs and praises, Ps. 33:1. In the opening of chapter 13 we see how the Word of God cuts like a two-edged sword against evil. Happy are they who attend to its solemn warnings. The law referred to here was Deuteronomy 23:3-5. Tobiah was an Ammonite, and it was a scandalous thing that the high priest was not only allied to him by marriage, but had cast out the stores of the Temple in order to make room for him in the sacred edifice. Tobiah's influence was so great that the rest shrank from putting the law of separation into operation against him. When Nehemiah returned from a long sojourn in Persia he cast out all of Tobiah's goods, and restored the chamber to its proper use. If we have given up a chamber in our heart to any Tobiah, we must be prepared to do likewise.

13. A Disobedient and Gainsaying People.

Nehemiah 13:15-31. Let us remember to keep perpetual Sabbath in the heart, whatever be our outward life. In this life there is a Sabbath rest for the people of God, Heb. 4:9, but we must labor to enter into it, and must set God's angel of peace to keep the door against all intruders, Phil. 4:7. Twenty years before, Ezra had dismissed the strange wives, but the evil had risen again. Alas, how sadly do children expose the inconsistencies of their parents, and betray the evil of

unequal marriages! We see plenty of this around us; and where there is such a union, the balance is almost certain to turn in favor of the world and against vital godliness, Deut. 7: 4; 2 Cor. 6: 14. Nehemiah did not hesitate to add strong acts to strong words. Josephus says that this expelled priest was Manasseh, and that he went to his father-in-law, Sanballat, who built for him a temple on Mount Gerizim like that at Jerusalem, and that this was the origin of the religious rivalry and hatred between Samaritans and Jews, John 4: 20. The faithful servant and the dying thief join in the same petition, v. 31. To be remembered by Jesus Christ is enough reward for any of us!

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON NEHEMIAH

OUTLINE.

- (a) What were the two great undertakings which Nehemiah accomplished?
- (b) What were some of the means by which the religious life of the Jews was renewed?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) What other writer probably wrote part of the book of Nehemiah?
- (d) What does the book show concerning Nehemiah's life and character?
- (e) How long did the administration of Nehemiah last?
- (f) What was the secret of Nehemiah's efficiency?

SECTIONS 1—13. CHAPTERS 1—10.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

- 1. What was the cause of Nehemiah's grief?
- 2. What request did Nehemiah make of the king?
- 3. Which verse in chapter 4 shows the proper relation between faith and works?
- 4. Under what peculiar conditions did the building of the wall proceed?
- 5. How did Nehemiah procure justice for the poorer Jews?
- 6. How long did it take to build the wall? What did its completion prove to those who had tried to hinder the work?
- 7. Why was the registration of the returned Jewish exiles necessary?
- 8. For what purpose did Ezra assemble the people? What feast did they celebrate? When had it been instituted?
- 9. How does the history of Israel reveal the forbearance of God?
- 10. To what national sins did the people plead guilty?
- 11. What covenant was made and upon what four duties was especial emphasis placed?
- 12. What desecration of God's House was forbidden by Nehemiah?
- 13. How did Nehemiah enforce the keeping of the Sabbath?

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

1. Vashti's Noble Refusal.

Esther 1. The book opens with a royal festival, which lasted for six months, vs. 1-9. Perhaps the princes came up from their governments to partake of it in rotation. It finished with a banquet, open to all the people who dwelt in Shushan, great and small. Whenever men are overcome with wine, there is grave peril for women. Coarseness, indelicacy, impurity, troop in at the door, which has been unlocked by the excess of wine. Who can tell the anguish which has been caused to women, children, and the dumb creation through the intemperance of man! Here is given a glimpse of a noble woman, who respected herself too highly to yield to a demand, wholly foreign to the customs of the time, which forbade women to appear in public. Of course the king was incensed, all the more so because he knew that he was in the wrong. He had command over 127 provinces, but he could not rule his own spirit, and the sense of moral weakness is always irritating. He consulted his counselors, who were only too glad to fall in with and humor the royal whims; they counseled that the divorce of Vashti was a public duty, for the repression of wife-insubordination throughout the empire. Men are not always to be trusted when they legislate about women, or in respect to their own dignity. When wine is in them they may be expected to say and do very stupid things. It has been truly said that every Ahasuerus had his Memucan, a man who was sycophant and parasite, who held his influence by humoring caprice and lust.

2. The Service of a Foreigner.

Esther 2. Esther's Hebrew name meant Myrtle. It could not have been easy for her to retain her sweet simplicity amid the corruptions of her time, but her Per-

sian name means "a star," as though she were a garden enclosed, encircled by the atmosphere of the divine purity and protection. We must not judge Esther by our own standards, but by the custom of her time. Each of these young girls was considered to be married to the king, was kept under his roof, and was his wife of a lower rank. How great is the influence of Christianity in raising our standards and pervading the world with a loftier morality! She was not bidden to deny her parentage, but only advised not to proclaim it, v. 10. When, afterwards, she was raised to power, she showed no flinching from identification with her race. So she attained the highest position in the world to which a woman could aspire. God lifted her there to serve a high and noble purpose. Her relative, Mordecai, discovered a plot against the king, and told it to his ward, the queen, and she to her royal spouse. The deed was unrewarded; in this, however, the faithful doorkeeper felt no disappointment. He acted not for reward, but from a sense of duty. But the act was registered both in heaven and on earth, and it bore fruit. It is enough for us to do our duty, and please God.

3. Race Prejudice Breeds Hatred.

Esther 3. Josephus says that Agagite means a descendant of Agag, the common name for the kings of the Amalekites, Num. 24: 7. It is probably that something of the nature of religious homage to Haman was demanded, and this Mordecai could not tolerate for a moment. It would have been as bad as the falling down to worship the golden image of Dura. He, therefore, sturdily refused. What diabolical cruelty was here, to meditate the destruction of a nation to satisfy a personal grudge! The resolve was taken in the first month, when Esther had been queen for five years; but the lot indicated the twelfth month for its execution, so that Esther had twelve months in which to oppose the plan. The disposing of the lot was evidently God's, Prov. 16: 33. The bribe of four millions sterling, which Haman hoped

to get from the spoils of the slaughtered Jews, without doubt helped to pave his way, and make the king favorable to his request. The matter was soon settled, and the posts were carrying the edict of slaughter to the furthest limits of the realm. It reminds us of the decree for the massacre of the Huguenots. But God was over all. The strongest assaults are vain against him, Ps. 2:4. He will not let high-handed wrong proceed beyond a certain point, 2 Kings 19:28. Let us shelter behind him and be at peace, Isa. 54:14.

4. Opportunity for Patriotic Devotion.

Esther 4. It seemed as if the whole nation would suddenly be cut off to satisfy the hatred of Haman, and Mordecai knew that he had been the cause of the plot. Esther was evidently living in close sympathy with her uncle, though now separated from him. In reply to the demand that she should hazard her life for the people, there was at first a natural reluctance. Was her love for her people greater than her love for herself? In her resolve there was surely something of the great love of Christ. We may be quite sure that God will carry out his plans—with us, if possible; if not, in spite of us, to our utter loss. We should look upon our position as a sacred trust to be used for others. We are created for good works, which God hath prepared for us to walk in. There can be no presumption in action which is preceded by prayer and heart-searching.

5. Hatred Breeds Crime.

Esther 5. Thus the soul clad in the royal garments of Christ's righteousness stands in the throne-room with its request. It has already obtained favor, for has it not been accepted in the beloved? The Lord waits that he may be gracious. Delay is not denial, and in the meanwhile there are things to be seen and heard, which fill the soul with rapture. Have you touched the top of the sceptre? Have you claimed unto the half of the Kingdom? Have you invited the King himself to your

banqueting table? For the King himself is willing to be your guest. We feast at his table, but he comes and sups with us at ours. In all earthly joy there is alloy, something which detracts from full gratification; a Mordecai for Haman, because of whom all else availed nothing. The joy that this world gives is at the mercy of the least untoward circumstances, but "he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."

6. Gratitude for a Forgotten Service.

Esther 6. There was a divine providence in this royal sleeplessness. On the very next night Haman would be hanging on the gallows, and it would be too late for him to render this honor to the hated Jew. Therefore, on this night the king must be reminded of a forgotten incident, must ask if the chivalrous informant had been rewarded, and must, through Haman, decree his splendid reward. When we are suffering indignity at the hand of our enemies, who seem to pass out of our lives without making reparation, let us turn to this story, and remember that as honor came to Mordecai through Haman, so honor and reparation shall accrue through the very circumstances and people that seem most threatening. The wrath of man is made to praise God.

7. Craft Overreaches Itself.

Esther 7. Esther had prayed, as we have seen, 4:16, but she acted also. She took such measures as were possible, to gain the king's favor, to awaken his curiosity, and to appeal for his help. All the money that Haman could pour into the royal treasury could not compensate for the loss of an entire people. In his anguish of soul, Haman adopted an attitude of entreaty which seemed to the king a gross impertinence, and this sealed his fate. His face was covered as though he were no longer worthy to behold the king. The chamberlain sent to summon Haman had probably seen the gallows on that errand; and thus it befell that the wicked was taken in his own trap, Ps. 9:15. It may be that we

are to see in our modern world, on a national scale, the counterpart of this extraordinary reversal. Watch events transpiring in Palestine!

8. Courage Rewarded.

Esther 8. The ring symbolized royal power and authority; by this sign Mordecai was suddenly raised to the position formerly held by Haman. He also managed for Esther the large estate which had come into her possession. Because of the fixity of the customs and laws of the Medes, it was impossible to reverse the royal proclamation, which had decreed that the Hebrew people should be exterminated. So the king granted Mordecai permission to send letters to his people, allowing them to arm and defend themselves. The speed with which the circulation of the royal decree was carried out is a rebuke to the Church of God which has been entrusted with the gospel of salvation. More than eighteen hundred years have passed, and still immense multitudes have never heard the name of Christ or the love of God. Let us at least strain every nerve to pass on the joyful news, overtaking the tidings of death.

9. Deliverance by the Sword.

Esther 9. When the fateful day arrived, the Jews throughout the empire stood on the defense. As it appears from verse 16, seventy-five thousand of their assailants fell in the provinces and five hundred in Susa alone. Among these were the ten sons of Haman. No attempt at plunder was made by the victors. The second day was asked for probably to confirm the settled policy of Ahasuerus, and the exposure of the bodies of Haman's sons was rendered necessary by the virulent hatred entertained towards the Jews. Decisive measures were demanded to show their enemies the risk they would incur by pursuing Haman's policy. Haman was an Amalekite, and in this light we may recall Exodus 17:14, 16; Deuteronomy 25:19. In all this, especially in this terrible act of vengeance, we are reminded repeat-



ESTHER DENOUNCING HAMAN. Esther 7: 1-6.
From Painting by ERNEST NORMAND. Modern British Artist.

edly of the change that Christ's coming made in the world, even among religious people. Contrast Esther and Mary of Bethany!

10. The Feast of Purim.

Esther 9:20—10:3. The Feast of Purim—so called from 3:7—was held on the 14th and 15th of Adar, our February. The whole of this book was read on the previous evening in the synagogue. Whenever Haman's name was pronounced, the whole congregation made a terrible noise, and every voice shouted imprecations, "Let his name rot!" The reference to tribute in 10:1 shows that this book is a historical document, preserved in the state archives, and probably written by a Jewish chronicler, who may have owed his position to Mordecai himself. The providence of God is clearly discernible in all the incidents recorded here. Through all human governments and events a divine purpose runs; and as God exalted Mordecai to honor and glory, so will he work for those who love him, and so ultimately will he put all enemies under his feet.

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON ESTHER

OUTLINE.

- (a) What is the theme of this book?
- (b) Who are the chief characters in the story?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) What is the probable period of this story of Esther?
- (d) What is known regarding its authorship?
- (e) For what omission is the book remarkable?

SECTIONS 1—10. CHAPTERS 1—10.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

- 1. Why was Queen Vashti divorced?
- 2. Who was chosen as her successor?
- 3. Who was Haman, and what caused his hatred of the Jews?
- 4. What patriotic duty did Mordecai urge upon Esther?
- 5. What personal risk lay in its performance?
- 6. In what manner, and for what reason was Mordecai honored by the king?
- 7. How did the craft and hatred of Haman react against himself?
- 8. Why could not the order against the Jews be revoked?
- 9. How was Haman's plot nevertheless frustrated?
- 10. What feast was instituted by the Jews in commemoration of their deliverance?

II
THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH

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THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Both as a prophet and as a statesman, Isaiah took an active part in the affairs of Judah during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He was contemporary also with the prophets, Hosea and Micah. At the lowest estimate his public career extended over a period of forty years. According to tradition he was executed, by being sawn asunder, during the reign of Manasseh, to which there may be reference in Hebrews 11: 37.

Much controversy has gathered around the authorship of the book which bears his name. While there are difficulties in the way of attributing the entire book to a single writer, much more serious problems have been created by every attempt to divide the authorship among different writers.

Isaiah is called the "Evangelical Prophet," as a large part of his book is indissolubly bound with the life and work of the Messiah. Philip, finding the Ethiopian eunuch reading from this prophecy, "began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." The book contains also a wide variety of materials: prophetic oracles concerning the nations, sermons, hymns, apocalypses, narratives, and autobiography. It is commonly regarded as the greatest of the prophecies and its influence upon the development of Christian thought can hardly be overestimated.

The second section of the book, chapters 40-66, is "one of the finest poems existing in any language." The author's aim in this part is to encourage the Israelites in their exile by showing that Jehovah is supreme and that, therefore, no obstacle will be able to prevent the restoration of Israel and the overthrow of their enemies. In accomplishing his purpose, God uses the following agents:

1. Cyrus, "one from the East," 41: 2, who is also called "my shepherd," 44: 28, and Jehovah's "anointed," 45: 1, and who is to be God's instrument in overthrowing Babylon and delivering Israel from exile.

2. The "Servant of Jehovah." In several passages, 41: 8; 44: 1, 2, and 21, the nation of Israel is the "Servant of Jehovah," to accomplish his purposes with reference to all peoples, but, in many others, the personal, suffering "Servant of Jehovah" is beautifully pictured as God's instrument in the redemption of Israel and in the ingathering of the Gentiles. Through Christ, the Messiah, is to be fulfilled God's promise to Abraham, culminating in an endless Kingdom of peace and righteousness.

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

1. The Ingratitude of a Favored Nation.

Isaiah 1:1-9. This chapter forms the preface to the prophecies of Isaiah. It is a clear and concise statement of the points at issue between Jehovah and his people. Special urgency was given to these appeals, when first uttered, from the fact which was well-known to the Hebrew politicians and people, that Assyria was preparing for a great war of conquest, which would be directed specially against Jerusalem and her allies. This chapter is cast in the form of an assize, a crown case in which God is both complainant and judge. The conviction of sinfulness which the prophet desired to secure, was sought, not by appealing to a code of laws which had been transgressed, but by showing the ingratitude with which Israel had repaid the fatherly love of God. It is the personal element in sin that most quickly convicts men. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" "Thou art the man!" "He hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace!"

2. Religion without Righteousness Vain.

Isaiah 1:10-20. The prophet points out, first the misery that had overtaken the country, vs. 4-9; and then the sins of the ruling classes, vs. 10, 17, 21-23. What may be called personal and private sins, such as drunkenness, vanity, bribery, and the oppression of the poor, are viewed in their public bearing, as bringing wrath and disaster on the whole nation. No man can sin by himself. His most private sins react on the whole community. Thistle-down floats far and wide. In reply, the nation pointed to the splendid ritual and innumerable sacrifices of the Temple service. But these observances only added to the tale of their sins, because they were formal and perfunctory. The sacrifice of God is a broken

and contrite heart. The outward is absolutely worthless, unless it is the expression of the inward and the spiritual. But where a pure and holy spirit is present, the simplest forms are magnificent in their significance and value. To atone becomes the base of a ladder to heaven, and the thorn-bush flames with Deity. But forgiveness is freely offered to the guilty. Crimson and scarlet are the most lasting of all colors, and their removal impresses the completeness of God's pardoning love.

3. A Nation Purged of Dross by Disaster.

Isaiah 1:21-31. The great lover of our souls does not abandon his people even when they spurn the first overtures of his appealing pity. Though they refuse to yield to them, he refuses to cast them off; and sets himself by the cleansing judgments of his providence to wean them from the evil ways they have chosen and to win them back to himself. If only Jerusalem had now listened to Isaiah's earnest pleadings, she would never have been carried away into the seventy years' captivity in a land of strangers. This is the cleansing fire referred to in v. 25. Their ground of confidence, whether in themselves or their allies, would be destroyed, vs. 29, 30; the ring-leaders of the evil which had brought them to desolation would be exterminated; and there would emerge a new and purified people as in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. Let us thank God for the cleansing fires in national and personal experience. Let us not fear them when plied by the hand of love. See Mal. 3:3 and John 15:2, 3.

4. A Vision of World Peace.

Isaiah 2:1-11. This and the four following chapters must be classed together as a distinct portion of this book, belonging to the earliest years of Isaiah's ministry. Their date is 735 B. C.; about the time of the accession of Ahaz to the throne. Verses 2-4 are evidently an ancient prophecy by some unknown seer, for Micah also quotes it. This section presents a fair vision of the

future, when the beloved city must become the center of the religious life of the world, the seat of the theocracy, the burning nucleus of a reign of love and peace. We cherish this ancient prophecy as our guiding star in the present storm. But it can be realized only when the Son of God, riding forth on his white horse, has subdued his enemies. Then Revelation 21 and 22 will fulfil this ancient dream. The contrast between the ideal city and the actual is terrible, vs. 6-9. But let us not despair. The exalted Lord, from the right hand of power, is hastening the coming of the day of God.

5. An Exhortation to Humility and Reverence.

Isaiah 2: 12—3: 12. If men will not repent, they must suffer. If they will not voluntarily put away their idols and sorceries, they will be compelled to do so in the anguish of their disappointment with their helpless deities, v. 20. Nothing in that great civilization would be spared. High towers, fenced walls, ships, treasures, armor—all would perish. Their vaunted faith in man would cease. Life would become elemental in its simplicity amid the shelter of the ragged rocks. In sarcastic phrase the prophet depicts a despairing nation choosing for ruler the first man that came along with a decent coat on his back, v. 6; but in vain. We can almost hear the sob of the prophet's soul in vs. 8 and 9, and recall the tears of a greater than Isaiah, Who wept over this same Jerusalem eight hundred years afterward. Patriotism is one of the purest passions that can burn in the heart of man! "Lives there a man, with soul so dead, that never to himself has said, This is my own, my native land?"

6. Vanity and Selfish Luxury Condemned.

Isaiah 3: 13—4: 6. This paragraph opens with the majestic figure of Jehovah himself, who arises to judge the misrulers and plead the cause of the poor. The prophet enumerates the trinkets of the women of Israel, who had given themselves up to luxury and corruption.

Woman is the priestess and prophetess of the home and religion, and when she forsakes the level of spiritual influence for that of physical adornment, the salt has lost its savor and the whole commonwealth suffers. The manhood of a land is lost, morally and spiritually when woman falls from her high estate; and there could be no hope for Jerusalem until the divine fire had consumed the filth of her daughters, and the oppressive selfishness of her sons. Then once more each home in Jerusalem would have the same blessed signs of the divine presence as had once been granted to the Tabernacle—the shadowing cloud by day and the gleam of the Shekinah-fire by night. Let us claim these for *our* homes also!

7. A Disappointing Harvest.

Isaiah 5:1-17. In a picture of great beauty, Isaiah describes a vineyard situated on one of the sunny heights visible from Jerusalem. Every care which an experienced vine-dresser could devise had been expended on it, but in vain. The vine-dresser himself is introduced, demanding if more could have been done. When God selects a nation, a church, or an individual for high and holy work in the world and expends care and pains on the preparation of the instrument, and his plans miscarry through no failure on his part but through the obstinancy or obtuseness of the human soul, the measure of what might have been is the gauge of its doom. The worst weeds grow on the richest soil. This picture is the counterpart of Paul's dread of being a cast-away, 1 Cor. 9:27.

The six woes which follow, arising from drunkenness and avarice remind us of sorrows that menace the selfish heart. How different such a lot to the blessedness of the humblest soul that possesses God and is possessed by him! "Evil shall slay the wicked; and they that hate the righteous shall be condemned. Jehovah redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that take refuge in him shall be condemned," Ps. 34: 21, 22.

8. Warning against Pride, Intemperance, and Corruption.

Isaiah 5: 18-30. The wild grapes of Judah are here continued: blind atheism, vs. 18-20; proud self-conceit, v. 21; drunkenness, v. 22; injustice in the courts, vs. 23, 24. What a terrible description is that given in v. 18 of the inevitable progress of sin! The bacchanalian procession which is seen, in v. 14, descending with music and flowers into the open gates of Hades, is described in v. 18 as being drawn down by a cable. Men begin with a thread, but the thread of habit becomes a rope, and the rope grows to a cable, which ultimately lands a man in the pit. From v. 25 onward we have the description of impending judgment. Earthquakes, armed raids, civil strife, and famine fever, the devastating inroads of hostile invasion, a desolate land and a hungry sea such would be the forces of destruction which Judah's sin would unloose. Recent events have revealed the terror of such a visitation. Remember that the wrath of love is as severe as a consuming fire.

9. A Call to Heroic Service.

Isaiah 6. Kings die; Jesus lives. See John 12:41. We are here reminded of Acts 22:17, 18. How great the contrast between the worship of these seraphim in the Unseen-Holy and man's perfunctory rites! *Six wings*—two for meditation, two for humility, and two for service. Service should take only a third of our energy. *One cried unto another*—one inspired spirit will awaken others. The threefold repetition of the word *holy*, implies the Trinity. If door-posts tremble, much more should the hearts of sinful men! Isaiah, in the previous chapter, had uttered six woes against others, but his seventh and sorest woe is against himself. The sinner, like the leper, cries, *Unclean!* Lev. 13:45. The seraph did not wait to be told; he knew that there was only one cure for such need as the prophet's, vs. 9-13. When men refuse God's offered grace, every re-

fusal hardens. It is either "the savour of death unto death" or of "life unto life," 2 Cor. 2:16. The life of the oak and the terebinth only *seems* to become extinct in winter; there is revival in the spring. Is it winter with you? Pray for the springtime!

10. The Sign of Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:1-17. A new cycle of prophecy begins here, covering the reign of Ahaz. The complete history which illustrates these chapters is given in 2 Chronicles 28:5. The invasion of Judah by Syria and Samaria was permitted because a severe warning was needed to enforce Isaiah's remonstrances and appeals. See 2 Kings 15:37. The Holy City, as Isaiah predicted, was not to be trodden by the invader, though it would pass through severe suffering and anxiety. This immunity, which neither Ahaz nor his people deserved, was secured by Isaiah's faith and prayer, pleading as he did, God's ancient covenant.

This great prophecy of the coming Immanuel must have greatly encouraged that generation, as it has all succeeding ones. It inspired Psalm 46. What greater comfort have we than that Jesus is the companion of our pilgrimage? See Matt. 1:21-23. Though the cornlands were desolate, the cattle on the mountain-pastures would yield butter and the wild bees honey; and this would supply the nation's needs till the invader had withdrawn. Though God chastens us, he will not forget our daily bread.

11. A Foreign Foe—God's Instrument.

Isaiah 7:18-8:4. Ahaz, as we have seen, summoned the king of Assyria to his aid. This policy, dictated by human prudence, was fraught with vast peril. He and his advisers would rue their choice, and would have to pay dearly for introducing Assyria into the complicated politics of these minor states. Though this policy might effect a temporary success, like that which Isaiah indicated in the naming of his newborn child, yet ultimately

it would work out disastrously, in the depopulation and desolation of the country. The impoverished peasants would have one cow instead of a herd, and two sheep instead of a flock. Is not this true of all the expedients which we substitute for faith in God? At first they promise well but they disappoint and fail. It is the old lesson: "Lean not to thine own understanding," Prov. 3:5.

12. Fear God's Power, Not Man's.

Isaiah 8:5-18. It seems likely that Syria and Samaria attacked Ahaz because he would not join in a federation against the growing power of Assyria. A strong party seems to have pressed this policy on him, but in all such schemes they repudiated the divine protection, v. 6. Compare Ps. 46:4. Ahaz and the court party on the other hand, sought to federate with Assyria. But Isaiah never ceased to urge that the true line of defense was to put away whatever was inconsistent with the fear of God. He would be the sanctuary of defense and hiding in the day of trouble, vs. 13, 14. We learn from Hebrews 2:13, how absolutely, when speaking thus, the prophet was being prompted by the Holy Spirit. If men will not build on God's foundation-stone, they fall over it to their hurt. Compare v. 15 and Matt. 21:44. Are we not all in danger of substituting human alliances for federation and union with the eternal God? Let our fellowship be with the Father and the Son; and let us wait for him till the day dawn and the day star shines, 2 Pet. 1:19.

13. The Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 8:19—9:7. When men cease to trust in God and rely on the help of man, they often turn to necromancy and spirit-rapping. The medium takes the place of the Mediator. The *seance* is sought after instead of the Law and the Testimony. What have God's children to do with back-stair gossip, when their Father's presence-chamber is open to them? What he does not tell us is not worth our knowing.

The land of Galilee was destined to suffer sorely, but better days would dawn on its mountains and lakes. The joy that was in store is compared to the daybreak, v. 2; to the joy of harvest, v. 3; and to the gladness of the harried tribes when Gideon broke the power of Midian, v. 4. The implements of battle would become fuel for the peasants' cottage-fires. What titles are these for our Lord! They befit no human babe! Let us place the government of our lives on his shoulders; and as it extends so shall our peace. Ask God's zeal to do this for thee! In the power of his grace, put the government of all on the wonderful Son of God.

14. False Leadership Brings Ruin.

Isaiah 9:8-17. The grievous sins of the Chosen People are again enumerated. They defied God, vs. 9, 10. They refused to repent; they were blind and deaf and profane, v. 13. Their religious and political leaders led them astray, v. 16. What could they expect but the letting loose of the judgments of the Almighty!

Isaiah's protests were disregarded, and 2 Kings 15 tells the sequel. It seems very terrible. But what would the forest-glades become if there were not a perfect machinery for the instant removal of all traces of disease, decay, and death! What is true in the physical is true also in the moral sphere. When a nation has ceased to help, and has commenced to impede the progress of humanity, it must be put out of the way.

15. Social Injustice Condemned.

Isaiah 9:18—10:4. The terrible indictment of the preceding paragraphs is continued here. Notice the awful monotony of the refrain, vs. 12, 17, 21; 12:4. Internal anarchy spread with the rapidity of a prairie fire. Jealousy and distrust awoke murderous hatred. Even the ties of brotherhood would not avail to arrest the knife of the assassin. In the horrors of starvation men would consume their own flesh, v. 20. Civil strife would exhaust the forces, which, combined with God's blessing,

might have arrested the invader. The weak would become the spoil of the strong; and there would be no appeal. What pathetic questions are suggested in 10:3! *What will ye do? To whom will ye flee?* See Heb. 9:26-28. What hope is there for the soul that has known and refused the offer of forgiveness in Jesus! Dear soul, make haste to the cleft of the Rock!

16. The Mighty Laid Low.

Isaiah 10:5-19. This question is addressed to the Assyrian invader, described as God's staff and rod. He was the means of inflicting deserved penalty on the world of that age, and especially on the Chosen People. He had no thought of this, but considered himself free to wreak his will without reference to that Higher Power whose agent he was. But the ruthless manner in which he carried out his work was destined to come under the divine judgment, vs. 12-15.

The capture of Jerusalem seemed as sure as the taking of a nest of eggs. The strongest barriers that the nations could oppose to his arms had fallen before the Assyrian king; and surely the Hebrew city should not escape. But God had yet to be reckoned with, vs. 16-19. The conception here is borrowed from a forest fire, which begins among the brushwood and presently consumes the loftiest and stoutest trees; so would the fire of destruction be kindled during the attack on the Holy City, which finally would involve the whole Assyrian empire. Let us not fear the wrath of man. God makes some portion of it to praise him, and he restrains the remainder.

17. A Remnant Shall Return.

Isaiah 10:20-32. Notice the effect of the Assyrian invasion. The survivors would once again return to stay themselves on God, v. 20. It is a remarkable expression! Let us ponder carefully vs. 20 and 21. We are reminded of Cardinal Mercier's famous pastoral letter, written after the desolation of Belgium, "Men long un-

accustomed to prayer are turning again to God. Nor is that prayer a word learned by rote; it surges up from the troubled heart, and takes its form at the feet of God by the very sacrifice of life." It is evidently necessary that God, from time to time, should break up the foundations of human society in order that men may be awakened to consider the elemental realities of God and the soul, vs. 24-27. The destruction of Sennacherib is anticipated as resembling the overthrow of Midian by Gideon, and of Egypt in the Red Sea. Then the burden and yoke would be destroyed, so far as Jerusalem was concerned, in answer to the anointed priests who had pleaded for her deliverance. But how much more will the prayer of our anointed Saviour bring help to us!

18. The Kingdom of the Messiah.

Isaiah 10:33—11:9. The advance of the Assyrian along the great north road is graphically described. It was marked by raided villages and towns. The night sky was lurid with flames. But his collapse would be as sudden and irretrievable as the felling of forest timber. As the one chapter closes we can almost hear the crash of the Assyrian tree to the ground, and there is no sprout from his roots. But in the next the prophet describes a fair and healthy branch uprising from the trunk of Jesse's line. The vision of the King is then presented, who can be none other than the divine Redeemer on whom rests the sevenfold Spirit of God. The second verse defines the work of the Comforter, and is evidently the model of that royal hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus*. But remember that he on whom this divine unction rested longs to share the pentecostal gift with the least of his disciples, 1 John 2:27. Note that as man's sin brought travail and groaning on all creation, so will his redemption deliver it, Rom. 8:19-25.

19. A Song of Thanksgiving.

Isaiah 11:10—12:6. The prophet's vision extends. He has seen the effect of redemption, as it emanates

from Jesus Christ, upon the whole physical creation; now he beholds also the ingathering of all Israel. The ancient enmity between Ephraim and Judah would pass away. As Paul puts it afterward, "All Israel shall be saved," Rom. 11:25, 26. As they were brought out of Egypt, so shall they be brought from all the countries of the world, where they have dwelt during these Christian centuries. The return of the Jews under Ezra included those of one tribe only, and cannot fulfill the great dreams of all the prophets as here of Isaiah. The following chapter is the counterpart of Exodus 15. When their enemies are overwhelmed in the great battle of Armageddon, the ransomed hosts of Israel shall break forth in this anthem.

The 3rd verse was chanted by the priests on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, John 7:37, 38. The little possessive pronoun *my* is the bucket with which we draw water from the depths of God. Our pilgrimage way is lined by these wells of saving help.

20. The Desolation of a Guilty World.

Isaiah 24:1-13. This and the three following chapters form a single prophecy, describing the calamities about to desolate the land, because the inhabitants had *transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant.* Primarily it describes the experiences of Palestine under the successive invasions from the Euphrates valley, first of Nineveh and then of Babylon. There is a mysterious connection between the condition of a man's soul and the response of surrounding nature. The very vineyards would sigh in sad accord with the prevailing misery and sin, vs. 7-9; and in the great city silence would reign in streets decimated by plague and war, vs. 10-12. Both in the Old and the New Testament the blessings of sufficiency and comfort are the fruits of holy living; whereas, sooner or later, evil overtakes wrong-doing. "Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed," is always true.

21. The Inescapable Penalty of Sin.

Isaiah 24:14-23. There is always a godly remnant, as we are told in v. 13, remaining in times of shaking, on the topmost boughs. The survivors who had fled across the seas from the judgments, would adore Jehovah for his goodness and mercy.

The fires of the East are in contrast to the isles of the West, v. 15. Perhaps they stand for the fires of tribulation, in which we must glorify God. To whatever part of the earth the fugitives fled, they would be compelled to acknowledge the glory of righteousness, or perhaps of the Righteous One. The dispersion of the Church in the early days carried the message and music of the gospel everywhere. Though we may travel to the limits of sorrow, let us glorify our God.

Note the instability of all earthly things. v. 18. etc. Woe to those who trust in them! Remember to build within the borders of the everlasting kingdom of Hebrews 12:23-28. When all the world kingdoms are destroyed, that of Israel, God's ancient choice, shall stand, v. 23. May we as the brethren of the King share his glory and reign with him in those great coming days! In the meanwhile glorify him in the skies.

22. Sorrow Turned to Gladness.

Isaiah 25. Here is a song of thanksgiving at the fall of Babylon. When she fell, a sigh of relief passed over the whole world, and strong, terrible nations over which she had exerted her tyranny gratefully recognized the goodness and righteousness of Jehovah. We may anticipate, as we read these glowing words, what that song will be when the spiritual Babylon is overthrown, Rev. 19:1-7.

Notice how God suits himself to our need, whether for strength, or refuge, or shadow. Take from him what you are needing most. As the cloud draws its veil over the burning sunshine to mitigate its heat, so does God interpose to reduce the sufferings of his own. The

branch, that is, the exulting song of the terrible ones, their song of triumph, shall be hushed. From v. 6 we learn that the hunger of man for God can only be satisfied in Jesus; and from v. 7, that the dread of death and the hereafter, which has lain heavily on humanity as a pall shall be forever ended, when Jesus comes the second time unto salvation. Compare 1 Cor. 15:54. God will not only wipe tears from our eyes but the fountains of tears shall be dried up, Rev. 21:4.

23. Peace through Steadfast Trust.

Isaiah 26:1-10. No doubt when Babylon fell before Cyrus the Jewish remnant under Ezra and Nehemiah sang this triumphal ode, which contrasts the respective lots of Babylon and Jerusalem. The one is the city of this world and its children; the other the city and home of the saints. The fate of Babylon is delineated in vs. 5 and 6; but with what glowing words does the prophet dwell on the blessedness of those who are fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God, Eph. 2:19. Note in v. 3, *margin*, one of God's double doors against the intrusion on the soul of a single note of alarm or fear. God is the Rock of Ages, v. 4, *margin*. Our trust should be permanent as his love—forever. The weakest foot may trample on the proudest foe, when God has laid him in the dust. God levels the path of the just. However difficult *your* path, dare to believe that you are being directed in righteousness. God cannot make mistakes. Any other path would be impracticable. Only nurse the desires of your soul for God; they are the result of the promptings and drawings of his Spirit.

24. Chastened by Suffering.

Isaiah 26:11-21. When God ordains our peace, a world in arms cannot disturb us. Our peace results from the conviction that God is going before us and preparing our works. But be careful to make mention of his name, that is, to give him the glory.

Do not be afraid of your enemies. When God brings you back from the ends of the earth, he will free you from their toils and snares. Let us, as v. 16 suggests, pour out our prayers, as a vessel its contents; though, as the Hebrew signifies, those prayers are but whispers. It is true that apart from God we work no *deliverance in the earth*, v. 18, but when he speaks, even the dead live. Jesus, the resurrected and the life, speaks in v. 19. What comfort results to those that dwell in the dust of self-abasement and despair to look up to the ever-living Christ, from whom streams of life-giving energy come to believing hearts! Arise and sing, thou broken heart: even now the stone is being rolled from the door of thy sepulcher; the morning dew is distilling upon thee. Cast out by earth, thou shalt be welcomed by heaven, and sheltered in God's secret place till the storm-burst has spent itself.

25. God's Care for His Vineyard.

Isaiah 27. Throughout these chapters we must remember that the doom of Babylon and the restoration of God's people are symbolical of other events, for which the world is preparing. Then Babylon the Great shall give place to the Holy City, which comes down out of heaven from God. Egypt and Babylon are represented by the leviathan, a general term applicable to any great water animal. The one had its Nile, the other its Euphrates. Parallel with the destruction of our foes is God's care of his own people. The Church is his vineyard. We do not keep him, but he, us. Not for a moment does he relax his care. Those who oppose his purposes are trampled down as briars beneath the booted foot. In v. 6 we have a prevision of the ultimate mission of the Hebrew race.

Note the difference in vs. 7-11 between punishment and chastisement. The former is irremediable and destructive, the latter is always in measure. The rough wind is stayed in the day of the east wind. Its object is to purge away our sins. After the captivity

idolatry ceased out of Israel. How tenderly God gathers his wanderers—one by one as hand-picked fruit; even those who had wandered farthest and were ready to perish!

26. The Decay of an Intemperate People.

Isaiah 28:1-13. A new series of prophecies begins here and extends to *Isaiah 32:20*. Samaria is described as a faded crown or garland on the nation's head because it was disgraced by the national drunkenness. See *Amos 4:1*. So corrupted was she by strong drink and its attendant evils that the Assyrian invader would plunder her as a man gathers ripe figs. But to Judah, that is, *the remnant*, the Lord would be a crown or garland, not of pride but of glory. His beauty would not be as a fading flower, but a lasting diadem. What wine is to the sensuous man, that God is to the spiritual. See *Eph. 5:18*. You that have to form right judgments, and you that have to turn the battle from the gate, will find all your need in him. In vs. 7 and 8 we have a terrible picture of widespread effects of strong drink; and in vs. 9 and 10 the prophet recites the ribald remarks addressed to himself by the roisterers of those evil days. He replies that God would himself answer them by the stern accents of the Assyrian tongue, which would sound like stammering, v. 11; and this would befall them because they would not need the wooing accents of his love, v. 12.

27. Truth the Only Refuge.

Isaiah 28:14-29. In the beginning of Hezekiah's reign the Jewish leaders had made an alliance with Assyria, on whom they relied to protect them against any and all foes. But the prophet told them plainly that they would be disappointed, and that when the Assyrian scourge passed through the land toward Egypt, it would involve them also in disaster, v. 18. Then he broke out with this sublime description of the only foundation of security that could never fail. The deep meaning of

this prediction of the precious corner-stone is unfolded in later Scriptures, Matt. 21:42; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:7. Christ was tried by Satan and by man: he is precious: he unites the walls of Jew and Gentile that were at right-angles to each other. All our excuses and professions are too short and too narrow when God enters into judgment. Outside of Christ there is neither peace nor safety. See that thou buildest on him a holy character of gold, silver, and precious stones, 1 Cor. 3:10, etc.

28. Fatal Reliance on Human Aid.

Isaiah 30:1-17. Toward the close of the 8th century, B. C., Jerusalem sent ambassadors to seek help from Egypt against Assyria, in distinct defiance of God's repeated warnings. Isaiah denounced this as adding sin to sin. Even though their princes reached Zoan and Hanes, capital cities, and succeeded in their object, it would not help them. The beasts of burden might traverse the deserts with presents and bribes, but all would be in vain. These truths, however, were unpalatable, and the politicians endeavored to silence the prophet, vs. 9-11. All sin recoils on the sinner. At first his efforts seem to protect him, but soon the wall begins to bulge, then it totters, finally it falls. The true policy, urged by Isaiah in v. 15, would be to renounce these efforts for Egyptian help and return to rest in the loving care of God. In returning and rest they would be saved! Oh, that we were more quiet and calm in the face of danger, hushing our fears, stilling our throbbing hearts, and leaning back on the everlasting arms! God cannot fail you, ye fearful saints.

29. The Goodness of God's Severity.

Isaiah 30:18-33. Jerusalem refused God's invitation to return to him and rest; they preferred to trust in Egyptian cavalry. Their almighty friend knew that this would end in disappointment, but he said that he would wait till they had exhausted every expedient and

returned to him. Then would he be gracious and have mercy. The results of repentance and forgiveness are set forth with singular beauty: no more tears; great grace; answered prayer; divine teaching; guidance in the right way; no more idols; good harvests and rich pasture-lands; the dumb creation benefiting by man's repentance; and thus, in v. 26, we come to the light of the millennial dawn.

In vs. 27-33 Jehovah is represented as coming to avenge his people and to judge their enemies. Their welcoming gladness is compared in v. 29 to the songs of the Hebrew festivals. What a magnificent description in vs. 30 and 31 of Jehovah as a man of war! Every stroke he inflicted on the foe would awaken the music of tabrets and harps in the temple at Zion. Tophet, near Jerusalem, was the place where refuse was burnt. The spiritual counterpart of its fire is ever burning up the waste-products of men and nations.

30. A Nobler Future for the Nation.

Isaiah 31: 1—32: 8. Isaiah continues to denounce the contemplated alliance with Egypt. His compatriots put their trust in horses and chariots, and refused the help of their fathers' God. Yet was he not so wise as the Egyptians, and equally as strong! And were they not running a fearful risk in rejecting One who would not recall his words of threatened punishment to those who refused his help? At best, the Egyptians were men, and not God, and their cavalry, flesh. If only they would trust him, God would defy their foes, as a lion defies a company of unarmed shepherds, v. 4. The mother-bird hovers over her brood to protect it from the kestrel; so would he spread his covering wing over Jerusalem, v. 5. We may have deeply revolted, yet we may turn back to God with the certainty that he will receive and rescue us, v. 6.

Sennacherib fell by the sword of his sons. Compare v. 8 with 2 Kings 19: 36, 37. How different is *our* glorious King, whose many-sided nature meets all *our*

needs! 32:2. Before him all men are unveiled in their true characters. Only those who are royal in heart shall stand before him, v. 8.

31. The Fruits of Righteousness.

Isaiah 32:9-20. When Christ's kingdom is set up it will bring dismay to the poor children of fashion. For more days than there are in the year will they be troubled, v. 10, and will smite on their breasts in lamentation, v. 12. The prediction of vs. 15-20 includes Pentecost, and looks forward to the era which lies immediately beyond this travail of the world. What is now reckoned as a fruitful field will be regarded as a barren forest in comparison with what shall then exist. Let us remember that righteousness must precede peace. See Matt. 5:24 and Heb. 7:2. When God's judgments are hurtling through the air, and proud cities are being leveled to the earth, let us take refuge in his loving care. In him are our safe dwellings and our quiet resting-places. But when the world is most unquiet, let us pursue our work of salvation; for when waters overflow the banks of the river, oxen and asses may still be sent forth to make furrows for the harvest seed.

32. God Exalted in Judgment.

Isaiah 33:1-12. Here we have the final prediction against Sennacherib. He had dealt very treacherously by returning against Jerusalem, though he had taken a heavy ransom to leave it unmolested, 2 Kings 18:16. In v. 2 Isaiah recalls the daily prayer offered by the priests in the Temple, when they heard of the steady advance of the foe. It was quite true that nations had fled before the dreaded Assyrian, v. 3; but in this case those precedents would be reversed, v. 4, because the Lord would appear for his people, v. 5. That was a sweet assurance that the prophet gave to Hezekiah in v. 6—to sustain his spirit through the strain of the invasion described in vs. 7 and 8. God always gives us a promise on the eve of trial. He victuals his ships ere he exposes

them to the storm. Though God sometimes seems to sleep yet when the hour strikes for the deliverance of his people, he will not tarry for a single moment. Be of good cheer; he will ride upon the wings of the wind to succor you!

33. The Reward of the Righteous.

Isaiah 33:13-24. The devouring fire and everlasting burnings of v. 14 are clearly the emblems of the divine presence. The righteous dwell in God as the bush which was baptized in the Shekinah-glory and was not consumed. The fire of his holy presence makes them holy at the same time that it protects them from their enemies. Compare with Psalm 15. They are characterized by their walk, speech, the closed fist, the stopped ears, and the shut eyes. They dwell in heights which are inaccessible to the foe, and no oppressor can cut off their supplies of hidden manna or water of life. Hezekiah, Isaiah predicts in v. 17, would soon put off his sackcloth, and the citizens would cease to be penned up in a beleaguered city. They should recall the terror of that hour as a bad dream, recalled to be dismissed and forgotten. Zion had no river, but God would be all that a river was to other cities, without the disadvantages of navigable water which might serve for the passage of a hostile fleet. Be sure to make God your judge, lawgiver, and king. Then, notwithstanding that you limp in weakness, you shall gather your share in the great spoils of victory.

34. Reaping the Whirlwind.

Isaiah 34:1-17. This chapter is one prolonged description of the judgments which were to befall the nations at the hand of Assyria and Babylon. The imagery employed is borrowed from the destruction of the cities of the plain. Streams of pitch; dust of brimstone; the ever-ascending smoke of a furnace; the scream of the eagle, hawk, and owl; the invasion of palaces by the thistle; the howl of the wolf; the call of the jackal; the arrow-snakes nest; the kite with its mate—such are

the illustrations employed to depict the scorching desolations which were impending. Edom is especially mentioned as suffering these awful desolations because of her long-standing hatred of Israel. See Ps. 137:7; Ezek. 36:5; Lam. 4:21, 22. These terrible and graphic predictions have been literally fulfilled, but they foreshadow those further and eternal disasters which must overtake wilful and designed rejection of the divine purposes and laws. Are not all nations at this hour standing before the Son of man and being judged? See Matt. 25:31.

35. The Rejoicing of the Redeemed.

Isaiah 35. God's judgments change Carmel and Sharon into a waste; but his blessing makes the wilderness and parched land as Carmel and Sharon. Where the smile of God rests, deserts sing and become carpeted with flowers. Your hands may be weak and your knees feeble, but when your helplessness invokes the help of God, he will begin to perform wonderful things that pass expectation. Say over and over to yourself: "My God will come: be strong, my heart, and fear not. He will come and save." Oh, for the quickened sense; the bounding leap of our nature lamed by the fall; the songs from lips that God will touch! Your dreariest desert shall become water-springs; the mirage shall no longer disappoint; thirst shall be satisfied; and the dragons of the heart extirpated. Nothing can hurt us while we walk with God in holiness. Dreaded evils may threaten to cast their shadows on our path, but they shall not stay our songs as we come with singing unto the everlasting joy.

(The questions on Sections 1-35, to be found on pp. 92, 93, will serve as a review at this point.)

36. The Cry of Jehovah's Herald.

Isaiah 40:1-8. Voices are ever speaking to us from the infinite; let us heed them. (1.) *There is the voice*

of forgiveness, v. 2. Are you truly penitent? Have you put away your sin? Have you meekly accepted the chastening rod? Then be of good cheer, this promise is for you. The time of hard service as a conscript (the literal rendering) is accomplished, your iniquity is pardoned, you have received double for all your sins. God speaks comfortably to your heart, that you may be able to comfort others as he does you, 2 Cor. 1:4.

(2.) *The voice of deliverance*, vs. 3, 4. Between Babylon and Canaan lay a great desert of thirty days' journey with mountain ranges, yawning gulfs. But when God arises to deliver his children, "who cry day and night unto him," crooked places straighten out, rough ones become smooth, and mountains disappear.

(3.) *The voices of decay*, vs. 6-8. The one herald, speaking from his observation of human mortality, describes man and his glory as the "flower of the field." But in contrast to this, another voice seems to break in with the eternal word of God, which stands forever. The precepts, promises, and invitations of the gospel are as sure as God's throne, 1 Pet. 1:25.

37. Creator and Ruler of All the Earth.

Isaiah 40:9-17. Zion is bidden to climb the highest mountain within reach, and announce the advent of the Saviour-God. When all eyes are turned to behold him, expecting a mighty hero, lo, a shepherd conducts his flock across the waste lands, gathering the weakly lambs to his bosom and gently leading the ewes with their young. Do not be afraid of God; he has a shepherd's heart. Words can never tell out all his tenderness; his pitying, understanding love.

We are next conducted to the Great Sea, v. 12. Remember, says the prophet, that God's hands are so strong that the ocean lies in them as a drop of water in man's. He can place mountains in the scales he holds. So great is he that if all Lebanon's forests were laid as wood on his altar, and all its beasts were consumed as burnt sacrifices, it would not be sufficient to set forth

his praise. And this God is our God forever and ever. The Creator of the ends of the earth is our Father.

38. The Everlasting God the Giver of Strength.

Isaiah 40:18-31. Day changes to night, and as the twilight deepens, the stars come out in their myriads, v. 26. To the poetic eye of the watcher, they appear as a vast flock following the shepherd, who calls each by its name. Not one falls out of its place, or is lacking. Will Jehovah do so much for stars and nought for men? Will he not have a name for each? Will he not guard and guide each? If he has sustained the orbs of light in their mighty rounds, will he fail the poor soul that clings to his feet?

They that wait on God change their strength. In their earliest days they rely on the energy and vigor of youth, on their blameless, unstained character, in the consciousness of their glorious manhood; but as years pass, they come to count all these as refuse in comparison with Jesus Christ the Lord, Phil. 3:8. Notice the order in v. 31! At first sight we should have expected that it would advance from walking to running, and so to flying. But that order is reversed. It is more difficult to walk than to mount! Every cyclist will tell you that the hardest task is to keep your cycle at walking pace.

39. The Lord Upholdeth His Servant.

Isaiah 41:1-16. The conception of this passage is superb. Jehovah is represented as summoning the earth to determine whether he or some idol of the heathen is the true God, v. 7. Also see v. 23. The test proposed is a simple one! Which can most precisely predict the future? Not, as in Elijah's case, is the appeal made to fire, but to the fitting of prophecy with historical fulfillment. See vs. 22, 23.

While this great arbitration is in process, God turns with tender assurances to his own people. They were at this time captives in Babylon. They were poor and needy. They were surrounded by strong and crafty foes,

against whom they were as powerless as a worm. But no height, however precipitous, or depth, however profound, could separate them from his love. Heart and flesh might fail, but he would strengthen; difficulties might appear insurmountable, but he would help. *He does more.* He takes his people, weak as worms, and makes them, if they but yield to him, sharp threshing instruments having teeth before which the powers of evil become as chaff. O man, listen to God saying, *I will make.*

40. What the Lord's Hand Does for the Needy.

Isaiah 41:17-29. Life is not easy for any of us, if we regard external conditions only; but directly we learn the divine secret, rivers flow from bare heights, fountains arise in sterile valleys, and the desert blooms like the forest-glade. To the ordinary eye there might appear no outward change in the forbidding circumstance; but faith's eye always beholds a very paradise of beauty where other eyes see only straitened circumstances and a trying lot.

Once again our minds are brought back to the great convocation announced in the opening verses of the chapter. The idols are asked to say or do something to prove that they are divine. See vs. 21-23. But there is no response; with the result that a crushing verdict is passed on them as recorded in v. 24. On the other hand, the prophet of the Lord is prepared with his predictions of Cyrus "the one from the East," (see v. 2 and Isa. 44:28) which would be fulfilled before that generation had passed away. Let us give heed to the sure word of prophecy, "as unto a light that shineth in a dark place," 2 Pet. 1:19.

41. The Work of the Lord's Servant.

Isaiah 42:1-13. We cannot doubt the application of this passage to our Lord, Matt. 12:18-20. The unobtrusiveness of his life and work was clearly demonstrated in every hour of his sojourn among men. He silenced

those whom he healed. He stole away from the multitudes for prayer. He stayed in Galilee till his brethren were angry at his reluctance to show himself to the people. He did not "strive, nor cry."

How meek and lowly was our Lord! A "reed" is typical of a heart broken by unkindness or a sense of sin. There is no beauty in the russet plume. It will not even serve for the shepherd's pipe. The "smoking flax" cannot ignite, because hardly able to remain aglow. This is the symbol of one whose love is tardy and cold. But such our Lord does not ignore. He can use the commonest and most unlikely materials.

He is never discouraged and cannot fail; and since *he* cannot, neither shall the Church, nor shall we. His love and power are pledged to us. Let us sing to him and of him.

42. A Deaf and Blind Messenger.

Isaiah 42:14-25. There are times in our lives when God seems to hold his peace. Evil is rife, bad men prosper, society lies under the spell of vice. It is only *temporary*, however. Then God comes forth out of the silence, and shows himself "strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." He brings the blind "by a way that they knew not," and makes "the crooked places straight."

These wonderful things are wrought not for the wise and holy alone, but for the blind and the deaf, who nevertheless desire to serve him. See v. 19. God's help is not conditioned by our merit, but by our faith. In the eyes of men we may be the least fit to claim divine succor. But our deficiencies and failures constitute our most eloquent claim;—God knew what we were, before he ever stooped to identify himself with us. He is pleased to help us "for his righteousness' sake." His name and character must be maintained. Therefore he has magnified the law and made it honorable by the matchless obedience and death of his only begotten Son. See Gal. 4:4, 5.

43. Jehovah's Witnesses.

Isaiah 43: 1-13. The magnificent conception of chapter 41 underlies this. We have still the convocation of mankind, summoned to decide whether Jehovah or some idol god shall be recognized as the supreme deity. In the arena are rows of helpless images rich in paint and tinsel, but mute and helpless, vs. 8, 9. Jehovah, to vindicate his claims, calls into the witness box his Chosen People, that they may tell what they have known, tasted, and handled, of the Word of life, v. 10.

This special function is not confined to the Hebrew race. By the express words of our Lord it is shared by the Church. See Acts 1: 8. As our Lord bore witness to truth, his subjects are summoned to do the same. See 1 Tim. 6: 13, 14; Rev. 1: 5.

Let us witness to the love that never tires. "Fear not, thou art mine." Let us witness to a purpose that never falters, vs. 1 and 7. Let us witness to a deliverance that never disappoints. We are not saved from fire and water, but are delivered in the midst of them by the never-failing presence of our King. Let us ask for the Spirit of Truth to witness with us, Acts 5: 31, 32.

44. A Way in the Wilderness.

Isaiah 43: 14-28. Let us take care lest we thwart God's purpose in our lives. We were made to show forth his praise, v. 21; but we must beware of causing a revoking of his gracious purpose. See Num. 14: 34, R.V. margin. By prayerlessness, v. 22; by the neglect of little things, v. 23; by the lack of sweetness and tenderness in our disposition, v. 24. "Be not high-minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, neither will he spare thee," Rom. 11: 20, 21. R.V.

On the other hand, directly sin is repented of and put away, it is blotted out, v. 25. It is persistence in sin that causes God to turn from us. If we forsake what is evil, as soon as we are conscious of it, "the

blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." It is blotted out as a cloud from the sky and no more remembered against us forever. This is done for God's own sake. The reason for our salvation and deliverance is not in us, but in him. The cross of shame and sorrow was his own expedient, and the Lamb in the midst of the throne is the emblem of the divine Atonement, which was commenced and finished by the inexplicable grace of God.

45. "Besides Me There Is No God."

Isaiah 44:1-11. What gracious promises are given throughout Scripture, not only to God's children, but to their seed! Here the thirsty soul, longing for love, sympathy, God, is promised an abundant supply. See John 4:13, 14; Rev. 22:17. But notice the extreme beauty of the further response, which shall be made by the young followers of our Lord:

One shall say, *I am the Lord's*, v. 5. What ecstasy such a declaration causes to a parent's heart! Young friends, do not be satisfied till you have confessed Christ. Say, *I am the Lord's*. Another shall write on his hand, *unto the Lord*; that is, he shall dedicate his hand to do God's work in the world. Oh, to write a similar declaration on every member of our body! Another shall subscribe with his hand *unto the Lord*; that is, shall write these words on a blank sheet of paper, and his own name beneath them.

Again we have the conflict with the idols of the heathen, vs. 6-11. But what chance have their votaries when confronted by the glad and assured testimony of those who have seen the King in his beauty!

46. The Folly of Idolatry.

Isaiah 44:12-20. We are here conducted to a *metal* idol factory, v. 12. As we enter, we are forewarned that we shall find the workmen vain, and their delectable things unprofitable. With this caution, we watch the image being made beneath the heavy blows of the hammer, wielded by the swarthy smith. After a few hours

of work he becomes tired and thirsty. But surely an idol can never impart perennial energy and help, if its manufacturer is so easily exhausted.

Next, we are led into a factory of *wooden* idols, v. 13, where a carpenter is at work, drawing a pattern on a block of timber. The floor is littered with shavings, and the idol that is to receive worship and exercise authority is handled very unceremoniously. Lastly we follow an individual into the forest, where he saws part of a tree for firewood and the rest for his household effigy. What folly! These men are hungry for some object of worship, but they feed their hunger on ashes; and they cannot be made to realize that they are deceiving themselves. The true bread is Christ.

47. The Promise of Redemption.

Isaiah 44:21-28. What divine comfort there is in these gracious words! Notwithstanding all their wanderings and sins, the Chosen People were Jehovah's elect race. Nothing could make him forget them; he had redeemed them with the saving strength of his right hand. He could never forget *them*, but he would forget *their sins*. Their transgressions had melted into the blue azure of his love. If sought for, they could not be found. Nature was asked to be one great orchestra of praise. And notice that our redemption brings more glory to Jehovah than our undoing would.

In the following chapter the people are assured that they would return from captivity, to rebuild Jerusalem and re-inhabit the cities of Judah. They probably expected that their return would be marked by miracles as marvelous as those through which their fathers emerged from Egypt bondage. But God never repeats himself; and his purposes would work out through a heathen monarch, Cyrus, whom God was preparing as the executor of his purpose, v. 28. "Deep in unfathomable mines of never-failing skill, he treasures up his bright designs, and works his sovereign will."

48. Jehovah's Chosen Instrument.

Isaiah 45: 1-13. Cyrus is one of the noblest figures in ancient history. His character became a model for the Greek youth in strength, simplicity, humanity, purity, and self-restraint. We have seen that Jehovah had assured his people that Jerusalem would be restored, 44: 26. They probably expected a repetition of the Red Sea and the Exodus. But God does not repeat himself; and their deliverance from captivity was to be achieved through the victories that made Cyrus master of Babylon. See *Ezra 1: 1-4*.

God's plans are achieved through *individuals*, whom he equips and raises up for their specific work. There is much in all our lives that we cannot account for, and which is due to the girding of the Almighty. We do not always recognize the real sources of our lives. They are hidden in God. *He* girds us though we do not know him. Let us not gird ourselves in our own strength, but stretch forth our hands unto him, sure that he will neither fail nor forsake. See *John 21: 18*. They who thus utterly yield to God are bidden in the exercise of a daring faith to command, that is, to claim, his saving power.

49. A Call to the Ends of the Earth.

Isaiah 45: 14-25. As the prophet reviews God's method of delivering his people—so unexpected and so wonderful—he cannot restrain the ejaculation: *Thou art a God that hidest thyself!* “Deep in unfathomable mines of never-failing skill, he treasures up his bright designs and works his sovereign will.” You do not see how God is going to save you; but most certainly his Angel will redeem you from all evil.

God contrasts himself with idols, v. 20. We can never seek his face in vain. They that trust in man or their own devices are doomed to disappointment; but faith and prayer make all the difference. He is “a just God and a Saviour.” This is the wonderful combination that the Cross reveals. See *Rom. 3: 26*; *1 John 1: 9*. Look to

him and be saved. Even if you dwell in a far land or at the ends of the earth, and even if you can only look toward him with failing sight, remember that "there is life in a look." Dare to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." You have none of your own! Your strength is weakness! Your righteousness is full of flaws! Look to him; boast in him; and men shall come to you for your secret.

50. God's Salvation Shall Not Tarry.

Isaiah 46. Here is a startling contrast! Babylon is broken up. An invading army of stern monotheists have slain the idolatrous priests at their altars and are engaged in carrying out the idols for the bonfire. And as the Jewish remnant is witnessing the extraordinary spectacle, they are reminded that *their* God does not require to be borne. Nay, on the contrary *he* has borne his people from the earliest days and will continue to bear them till the heavens have passed away.

The contrast is a perpetual one. Some people carry their religion; others are carried by it. Some are burdened by minute prescriptions and an external ritual; others yield themselves to God, to be borne by him in old age as they were in the helplessness of childhood. They are persuaded that he will bear them "as a man doth bear his son," in all the way that they go, until they come to the prepared place. See Deut. 1:31; Isa. 63:9. God immediately responds to a trust like that, and his salvation does not tarry.

51. The Penalty of Trusting in Wickedness.

Isaiah 47. Babylon dwelt in careless security. She was given to pleasures, v. 8; and said in her heart that her vast crowd of astrologers, magicians, and priests, would certainly warn her of impending evil and deliver her. But nothing could be more absolute than **her** fall. For centuries she has been buried under mounds of desolation, while the Hebrew people, whom she so cruelly oppressed, are the monument of God's

preserving mercy. The fact is that Babylon exceeded her duty. She was used as Jehovah's chastising rod upon the Hebrews, but she was merciless in the extreme in her behavior and for this excess she suffered. Compare v. 6 with Zech. 1:15.

Notice the 4th verse. The prophet turns from the overthrow of the proud city to remind his people that Babylon's tribulation is due to the redeeming arm of God; and we must never forget that in the midst of her overthrow there was a thread of golden mercy. The loved that brooded over Nineveh must have been there. See Jonah 4:10, 11.

52. The Obstinate and Insincere Rebuked.

Isaiah 48:1-16. We are meant to be for God's praise and glory; but we may delay the realization of his high purpose. Our neck iron, our brow brass, we trust in idols and refuse to open our ear. It is necessary, therefore, to send us to Babylon, where, as in a furnace for silver, the dross and alloy are purged away. Many of us are in furnaces which have been rendered needful through our evil ways.

Notwithstanding our sins, God comes to the furnace mouth and chooses us there. For his own sake, *his own sake*, he does it that his name may not be polluted. He cannot give his glory to another. You cannot account for God's grace to you personally. He must have known all, from the first. Then dare to believe that the reason that prompted him at the first will suffice to the end. He is not "the son of man that he should repent." He who was the first will be the last. Jesus is Omega as well as Alpha; the end as well as the beginning! Fear not! Rev. 1:17.

53. "A Light to the Gentiles."

Isaiah 48:17—49:13. The first division of this second part of Isaiah closes at 48:22, with the phrase *there is no peace to the wicked*. The second division of part 2 closes with a similar phrase, 57:21. The first

division here ends with the proclamation for Israel to leave Babylon. They need never have gone there. If only they have been obedient in every particular theirs would have been the happy lot of v. 18, as contrasted with v. 22. But even under such circumstances, in captivity and as slaves of the Chaldeans the redeeming grace of God would triumph, 48:20; 49:5.

The second great division of Part 2 opens with 49:1. In their first and immediate reference, these verses evidently apply to our Lord. See Acts 13:47, etc. In the mission of Jesus, the ideal of the Hebrew race was realized. As the white flower on the stalk he revealed the essential beauty and glory of the root, 49:6. See Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:1, 2, 14, 15, etc.

There is a secondary sense, also, in which the Christian worker may appropriate many things in this glowing paragraph. Our mouth must be surrendered to God, that he may use it for his own high purposes. But do not dread the shadow of his hand. It is the quiver case in which he keeps his chosen arrows against the battle!

54. The Lord Cannot Forget His Own.

Isaiah 49:14-26. These assurances were given to the chosen race on the eve of their return from Babylon. They were timid and reluctant to quit the familiar scenes of their captivity; they dreaded the dangers and privations of their way home, and questioned whether the great empire of their captors would ever let them go or allow their city to rise from its ruins. Therefore the Lord's voice takes on a tone of unusual persuasiveness. Let us ponder his assurances of compassion and comfort, vs. 13, 15, 16.

He will lead us with a shepherd's care, v. 10. He will make obstacles subserve his purpose, v. 11. His love is more than motherhood, v. 15. He treasures the remembrance of his own, v. 16. Zion thinks herself cast away as a derelict, v. 14, but such is not the case. Even her broken walls are ever before God, with a view to their rebuilding, v. 19, etc. God's love is stronger

than our strongest enemies, v. 25, etc. Let us hide in it, standing above the fears that compose the cloudland of our soul, in the upper peaks of a strong faith.

55. Help for Those Who Trust in Him.

Isaiah 50. It is impossible for God to put away the soul that clings to him in penitence and faith. Heaven and earth may be searched, but no bill of divorce can be found. See Deut. 24:1. And he sends his great servant, our Lord, of whom this chapter is full, to deliver and assure our trembling faith.

Notice the difference in v. 4, between the Authorized Version and the Revised Version which reads, *Jehovah hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him that is weary. . . . He wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught.* This quality of *teachableness* was primarily true of Jesus. It was the habit of his human life to listen to the secret teaching of the Father, breathed into his heart. See John 8:28, 40. So also must we allow ourselves to be awakened by him, each morning, that we also may know how to help men more efficiently and tenderly.

From the first, Jesus knew that he must die. See Mark 10:34. But he did not turn back. See Heb. 10:5, etc. Was not his choice abundantly vindicated? The Father who justified him was always near, John 8:29. See John 16:22. Let us who may be walking in darkness learn from our King to stay ourselves on God.

56. "Awake, O Arm of Jehovah!"

Isaiah 51:1-11. This chapter is extremely dramatic. We are conscious that we are nearing a revelation of unparalleled sublimity. As we hear the thrice *Hearken* in vs. 1-8, and the thrice *Awake*, v. 9, which follows, we realize that we are traversing the entrance portico of a noble temple. When God says, *Hearken*, it is for us to ask him to fulfill—*Awake!*

Recall the loneliness of Abraham. "He was but one!" Terah died, Lot dropped away, Hagar was thrust out,

Isaac was laid on the altar, but the fire that burned in his heart only grew brighter. Do not despair if you are alone in your stand for God. One acorn, when the life of Nature touches it, may become parent to a forest. These exiled Jews hardly dared to hope that they could escape from their foes. The air was heavy with their revilings, but compare v. 8 with 50:9. With such assurances we may face a world in arms. The forces of evil are strong, but God is stronger. The clouds threaten, but the sun is shining. Don't forget the Lord thy Maker, thy Redeemer, thy Father! He cannot fail or forsake!

57. "The Captive Exile Shall Be Loosed."

Isaiah 51:12-23. During the Sepoy mutiny in India, when a number of English men and women were shut up in a quarter of Cawnpore, expecting a terrible death by assault or slow starvation, a torn page of the Bible, containing this passage, was found on the street pavement and was of unspeakable comfort. Oh, the blessedness of appropriating the 16th verse! See 49:7.

We are too apt to forget that God pleads the cause of his people, even when they have sinned and have reduced themselves to sore straits, vs. 17 and 22. We think more of the earth than of the over-arching skies; of the fading grass than of the tree of Life; of man than of God. The near obscures the distant, and the flaring earth lights, the shine of the stars! Root yourself in God! Think of him who sits at the right hand of the throne, the seat of resistless, ceaseless energy! Believe that God has placed himself between you and all enemies and circumstances which threaten. To fear all day is impossible in face of these paragraphs.

58. "Thy God Reigneth!"

Isaiah 52. It is not God that has become lethargic; but *we* that have slept and need to awake. Being awakened, we discover that two sets of attire are waiting for us: First, his strength, so that we may not be afraid of ten thousands of people who set themselves round

about; and secondly, the beautiful garments of our Lord's character. See Col. 3:9-17.

At last the climax of the long prophetic stairway is reached and the summons for the exodus from Babylon rings out, v. 11. It was God's return to the desolate city, vs. 2 and 8. The stately procession moves slowly and fearlessly. It is not the escape of a band of fugitive slaves, dreading pursuit and recapture, v. 12. Before it speed the heralds, appearing on the sky line as they ascend the mountains which surround the Holy City, publishing peace and salvation, v. 7. The central body is composed of white robed priests, bearing with reverent care the holy vessels, v. 11, of which Nebuchadnezzar despoiled the Temple, but which Cyrus restored. See Ezra 1:7-11. Thus, also, the Church marches through the world.

59. The Rejected and Suffering Redeemer.

Isaiah 53. The common lot of man may be summed up in three words: suffering, sin, and death. Our Lord, the Divine Servant, presents a notable exception to the rest of the race;—not in his sufferings, v. 3; not in his death, for he died many deaths in one, v. 9, R.V. margin, but in his perfect innocence and goodness. His sufferings were due to sins not his own, Rom. 5:8. We must make his soul our guilt offering, v. 10, R.V. margin. It is the same word as is used in Lev. 5:1-16. There is no need to summon the aid of another. Do it for yourself!

Jesus shall one day be satisfied. In the glory that shall accrue to the Father; in the redemption of untold myriads; in the character of the redeemed; in the destruction of the results of the Fall, we shall hear his sigh of content and see the triumph on his face. We shall witness his transference of the kingdom to the Father, 1 Cor. 15:24. We shall behold the satisfactory termination of the mystery of evil. If he is satisfied, we shall be!

60. The Wondrous Love of God.

Isaiah 54. We have heard the exiles summoned to leave Babylon, and have beheld the Saviour becoming the sin-bearer. Here our attention is recalled to the still desolate condition of Jerusalem. See Neh. 1:3; 2:3, 13-17. Jehovah says, *Sing*, but Israel replies that she cannot sing so long as she lies desolate. In reply God declares his inalienable love: he is their husband still and has sworn that the waters of death and destruction shall never be able to separate them from himself. The kindness of his mercy is everlasting, and his covenant of peace shall outlast the mountains and hills.

In the closing paragraph, vs. 11-17, we behold the chosen city emerging from her heap of ruins. Watched by the eye of the great Architect, wrought by unseen hands, tested by the line and plummet of righteousness, she arises to fulfill her mission to the world. To inspired hearts it seems as though her common stones are jewels. Her children are taught of the Lord. Every accusing voice is hushed. All weapons of destruction are impotent. The New Jerusalem seems to have come down from heaven.

61. The Free Offer of Pardoning Grace.

Isaiah 55. The Prince of Life, v. 4, R.V. Four times in the New Testament this title is applied to our Lord, and always in connection with his Resurrection. See Acts 3:14, 15; 5:31; Heb. 2:9, 10; 12:2, where the words prince, author, and captain, are various translations of the same Greek word. The meaning of the original word is file leader. He leads out of death into life; out of defeat into victory; out of suffering into perfection; out of the sorrow and pain of discipline into the triumph of the sons of light.

The everlasting covenant, v. 3. David's sin could not cancel the sure mercies of God. See 2 Sam. 7:14-16 and 23:5. God will never go back on that covenant which includes us! See Heb. 8. God's mercies in Christ are

sure. Listen! Come! Hear! We are not only forever safe, but we are provided against all want.

God's abundant provision is described under several terms: waters, wine, milk, wholesome and satisfying bread, the good, fatness, vs. 1, 2. We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ, Eph. 1: 3. And because God's thoughts and ways are not as ours, the result is the transformation of thorns into firs and briars into myrtles.

62. The Blessedness of Sabbath-Keeping.

Isaiah 56. The bright array of Messianic promises, which occupied the preceding chapters, is now followed by a portion of less interest, seeing that our attention is not now fastened on Christ, but on Israel. Birk calls this sermon "The Middle Ages of Delay," and says: "This new section of advice and warning belongs to the whole period from Isaiah to Christ. The like message applies now to the Church of Christ and its prospect of the Second Advent."

Special emphasis is laid on Sabbath-keeping because it was the special sign of God's connection with Israel. See *Exod.* 31: 13-17; *Ezek.* 20: 12. It was also a type and pledge of the redemption rest, soon to be brought in and perfected by Christ's finished work, *Heb.* 4: 9, 10.

What an ideal is presented here for character and conduct! To keep God's rest in our heart—the rest of faith; to cease from ourselves; to be joined to the Lord by one Spirit; to minister to him; to love his name; to be his servants! What more could we imagine as characteristic of the Christian soul! Let us ask God to bring us to his "holy mountain" and to make us "joyful" in his "house of prayer."

63. No Peace to the Wicked.

Isaiah 57. A terrible portrayal is given here of the idolatries and impurities into which the Chosen People had fallen. These scenes under "the oaks" (R.V.) and

in the valleys remind us of the invariable evils associated with idolatry which the great Apostle has recorded in Rom. 1:23-28. They refused to retain God in their knowledge, and he gave them over to a reprobate mind; that is, he ceased to restrain them.

But amid the degenerate nation, there was a handful of elect souls; God is always careful against rooting up the tares, lest one stalk of wheat perish. Amid the destruction that must overtake the guilty land they that trusted in him, would not be overlooked. See vs. 13, 14.

With what comfort the chapter closes! V. 15, etc. We may have been covetous and froward, and have deserved wrath and chastisement, but God will not always chide. Only return to him! He will revive your heart, and "restore comfort" to you. He will heal where he has wounded, and will bring you near, through the blood of the Cross. See Eph. 2:16, 17.

64. The Fast That God Has Chosen.

Isaiah 58. The divorce between outward rites and inward piety has been the curse of every age. When the Pharisees were plotting our Lord's death, they refused to enter Pilate's hall. Not the bowed head, but the broken heart; not the sackcloth and ashes of the flesh, but the contrition of the soul!

Notice the three paragraphs descriptive of the experiences of the devout and consecrated soul: (1.) *The conditions of blessedness*, vs. 6, 7. (2.) *The successive items which go to make a blessed life*, vs. 8-12. (3.) *The true Sabbath-keeping*, vs. 13, 14. Primarily, it is inward, not outward. Let us be on our watch against the entrance into our hearts of all thoughts that would break the holy inward calm. Remember to imitate Nehemiah's instructions: Neh. 13:16-22. Let the divine peace rule within and be as a sentinel keeping the outward gate, Col. 3:15; Phil. 4:7. Cease to follow your own ways, or find your own pleasures, or speak your own words. De-

light yourself in God; so shall you sit with Christ in heavenly places and feed at the heavenly table.

65. Iniquities Separate from God.

Isaiah 59: 1-15. Israel's sins, vs. 1-8. Much of our suffering in life results from our sins, which cut off God's health and help. Let us not blame Providence, but set ourselves to discover the cause of controversy. When the law courts—the fountains of justice—are demoralized, the community is in a hopeless condition, vs. 3, 4. Instead of stamping out evil in the egg, the sinful heart hatches it out, and it yields the poison of vipers, v. 5. Ah, the hapless state of the ungodly! Their feet, and their thoughts, and their paths, are fatal to the peace of others and to their own. The way of peace can be entered only at the Cross, and maintained only by constant watchfulness. See Luke 1:79.

Israel's confession, vs. 9-15. Here the stricken people pour out their complaint before God, confessing, first, the bitterness of their sufferings and then the blackness of their sins. The roar of the hungry bear for food and the dove's mourning for her mate, v. 11, are apt descriptions of the complaint of the penitent soul. It is a good sign when a man cannot lift up his eyes to heaven and beats upon his breast, Luke 18:13.

66. The Divine Arm Brings Redemption.

Isaiah 59: 15-21. Israel's Saviour. The Almighty Lover of souls is described as looking round to see if help were forthcoming from any other quarter; and there being none, he girds himself for the conflict with the enemies of his people. He dons breastplate and helmet, clothing and cloak, and hastens to deliver, v. 17. This is surely a portrait of our Lord Jesus, who stands up to plead the cause and to achieve the redemption of the penitent and believing soul. When the enemy threatens to pour in like a pent-up stream, look to Jesus to raise the standard against him. Let him fight your

battles! Let the blows that are meant for you be caught on his shield!

All parents and grandparents should ponder the precious promises of vs. 20, 21. As God gives us children, let us place our fingers on this sure word of promise and claim that it shall be literally fulfilled in children and children's children. In thousands of godly families there has been an unbroken succession of piety.

67. The Lord Glorifies His People.

Isaiah 60:1-14. From this chapter and onward, the prophet predicts the glories of the restored Hebrew people. In a secondary sense, they are also true of the Church, for we are blessed with faithful Abraham. See Gal. 3:8, 9.

The summons to *arise* is addressed to Jerusalem. The seer beholds the flush of dawn on the eastern sky and bids the Holy City catch the earliest beams, vs. 1, 2. While darkness veils the lowlands, the dweller on the plains looks up to the heights of Zion, vs. 3, 4, and finds them bathed in the splendor of dawn. See 2 Cor. 3:18.

There is a marvelous attractiveness in real religion. Where that is present, men need no driving. From the Far East come the camels, laden with priceless treasures, and from the distant West the ships laden with costly merchandise. The wastes of many years are rebuilt by the labor of strangers, while kings vie with each other in ministering to the beauty of the chosen city. When you are right with God, he will raise up help from unexpected quarters and even from former foes, v. 14.

68. "He Is Their Everlasting Light."

Isaiah 60:15-22. What a graphic delineation is presented in these words of the privileges of the consecrated life! The Mighty One of Jacob becomes its Saviour. Thenceforth it is ever ascending in the scale of experience, exchanging the period of stone for that of iron, of iron for silver, and of brass for gold.

Anxiety and depression are followed by long and happy years of fulness and joy. Violence and destruction, which, like vandals, hewed and burned, are replaced by salvation and praise. The Lord becomes the everlasting light, and the days of mourning are ended.

Do not think that such an experience is too good to last, and so beautiful that it must be evanescent. When once the dawn of perfect surrender and acceptance breaks, there is no sundown, no shadowed sky, no more sorrow or crying, no more heartbreak or hopelessness. The inheritance is forever! The branch is ever green! The strong nation is destined never again to become small!

69. "The Acceptable Year of the Lord."

Isaiah 61. Messiah's mission, vs. 1-3. At Nazareth our Lord applied these words to himself. Let us care for the outcasts as he did; but to do so, we need to be anointed with the Holy Spirit, who rested so mightily on him. The acceptable year is clearly that of Lev. 25:8-13. Our Lord, when quoting this, stopped at the comma, v. 2, because the day of vengeance is not yet. See Luke 4:19. Mark that it is only for a day! God not only delivers, but anoints and crowns.

Messiah's kingdom, vs. 4-9. In days yet future, the ruined cities of Palestine shall be restored. In a spiritual sense, we also may appropriate this promise. When we receive the Pentecostal gift, we also witness the restoration of the wastes, which our sins have caused in our own lives and in the lives of others. Let us clasp to our hearts vs. 7-9.

Messiah's joy, vs. 10-11. Jesus is the true bridegroom of the soul; and we may appropriate our side of these happy words. Note this combination of imputed and imparted righteousness. The one is put on as a garment, v. 10; the other blossoms out from within, v. 11. Oh, that from our lives God would cause righteousness and praise to spring forth!

70. The Land of Beulah.

Isaiah 62. The Intercessor. vs. 1-4. Messiah is speaking here. Throughout the ages, he ever lives to make intercession. He asks that his Church may be one, that the heathen may be given him for his inheritance, and that Israel may be restored. It is the cry of the unresting Saviour. When Jesus pleads for thee, poor soul, thou canst not be desolate and forsaken. God loves, though all hate; God delights, though all abhor; God remains, though all forsake.

Intercessors, vs. 5-7. The Great High-Priest calls us to be priests. The unresting Lord calls on us not to rest. He says, "Watch with me." He gives us rest from sin and sorrow, that we may not rest from prayer. We must take no rest and give God no rest. We are to become God's "remembrancers," v. 6, R.V.

The divine answer, v. 8-12. To the prophet's mind the prayer is already answered as soon as spoken. Already the highway must be prepared for the return of the exiles. So to us, who have lain among the ashes, salvation comes apace. Make ready to trail thy Deliverer! Then learn to become the salt and benediction of others!

71. The Mighty Saviour.

Isaiah 63:1-9. For long years there had been virulent hostility between Israel and Edom. It began when Esau and Jacob were lads. It broke out in bitterness when Edom denied Israel the right of passage, Num. 20:20, 21. When Babylon had triumphed over Jerusalem, Edom urged that her walls should be leveled to the ground, Ps. 137:7.

How great the change pictured here! The prophet stands at the division of the two countries, looking south, from the foothills of Judah across the sandy waste. In the distance he beholds the mighty Warrior coming up from Edom, his garments wet, not with his own blood, but with Edom's; henceforth to stand as sentinel

between Edom and Israel, so that nevermore need Israel fear invasion.

If Edom stands for sins of passion or for the hatred of unscrupulous foes, see how safe and blessed you are. Jesus, the Mighty to save, stands between you and your besetting sins, between you and your fears, between you and the power of the adversary, v. 9. "Mention the lovingkindness of the Lord!"

77. Salvation Obstructed by Rebellion.

Isaiah 63:10-19. The exhortation of the Apostle against grieving the Holy Spirit is based on v. 10. See Eph. 4:30. There is no limit to the gracious work which the Holy Spirit will do in and for us, if only we will take jealous care of our behavior toward him. Be specially heedful about thy speech! The least uncharitableness hurts him, as frost the spring-blossoms.

But God never forgets the *blessed* past and labors to restore it. See what he will do! His power shall work through a human wrist, v. 12. Before him the waters part and leave a path for his chosen. All that would cause us to stumble is taken out of the way and we are led as on a level plain. As cattle descend into the hollows of the hills at noon, to escape the sultry heat, so will God's Spirit cause us to rest. Oh, claim that these promises be realized! He is Father, Redeemer, the Eternal, the Lover of souls! Even when we believe not and have forfeited all claim on him, he remaineth faithful and cannot deny himself!

73. A Cry for Pardon.

Isaiah 64. *The great past*, vs. 1-5. We are introduced to the prophet's oratory and hear the outpourings of his heart. As he recalls the story of bygone days, he asks that God would do as he had done. It is as easy for God to rend the heavens as for us to tear a piece of cloth: and great mountains of difficulty dissolve before him, as a pyramid of snow in a thaw. God works while we wait. When there is no sign of his help, he is

hastening toward us. If you go out to meet him, he will quicken his pace, and run to embrace you. These are God's ways and in them there is everlasting continuance. See Mal. 3:6.

Confession and prayer, vs. 6-12. The leper, the foul garment, the fading leaf fleeing before the autumn gusts—such emblems become us. If our righteousnesses are black, what must not our sins be! We need Him who comes not with water only, but with water and with blood. See 1 John 5:6. Perhaps our greatest sin is our prayerlessness. We do not stir ourselves up to it. God cannot refrain his mercy, if we cannot refrain our tears!

74. A Seed Rescued from Destruction.

Isaiah 65:1-12. The prophet now enumerates the reasons that forced the Lord to turn aside from the Chosen People, and call in the Gentiles to occupy the place and perform the mission which they had despised and forfeited. Paul makes memorable reference to this passage. See Rom. 10:20, 21. Their gardens were scenes of debauchery; their altars were covered by polluting engravings; they practiced necromancy in the graveyards, and ate swine's flesh, vs. 3, 4. Fortune and destiny were their chosen deities, v. 11, R.V. While professing greater holiness than others, the land was filled with abominations.

But the Lord ever discriminates between the righteous and the wicked. Did he not spare Noah and Lot and Caleb? There has always been a faithful remnant, and these become the seed germs of a new nation. Ponder vs. 8-10. Then ask that your life may be like the new young grapes of the vineyard, on which the blessing of God rests!

75. A New Earth for God's Servants.

Isaiah 65:13-25. Notice the wide difference that religion makes to the soul. The children of God are secured against the evils which visit all others. *They*

eat; *they* drink; *they* rejoice; *they* sing; *they* are called by another name, vs. 13-15.

Behold a new creation, vs. 17-25! The present dispensation is ended. Jerusalem, restored to her former glory, sings for very joy; and her rejoicing sends a thrill of joy through the nature of God. Long years of life and security of tenure are granted again to man. The red rapine of the forest is ended, for creation is emancipated from its bondage and participates in the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Peace shall reign in the forest glades, never again to abdicate her throne, v. 25. But, best of all, there shall be such unity between man and God that prayer will be anticipated, and the pleading soul shall be conscious of the listening ear of God. Hasten, O day of days, for which creation groans, and the saints groan with inexpressible desire!

76. God's People Made a Blessing.

Isaiah 66: 1-14. The prophet forecasts the advent of a new day, when places and rites would be comparatively unimportant compared with the condition of the heart, vs. 1-4. The opening words were quoted by Stephen, when announcing the substitution of spiritual worship for the effete system which it superseded. See Acts 7: 48, 49. What is the outward rite to God, when the spirit has fled? It was all one to him, whether a man killed a lamb in the Temple, or broke a dog's neck on his farm. His chosen home is not in ornate temples but in contrite hearts!

The blessedness of God's people is depicted in glowing words, vs. 5-14. God will appear, to the joy of his people and the recompense of their foes. Those times will be characterized by great revivals, and souls will be easily born into the heavenly kingdom. The Jew and Gentile will meet like confluent streams in one blessed channel. But, above all, we shall become aware of the mother-side in God's nature. *As one whom his mother comforteth, v. 13.*

77. All Flesh Shall Worship the Lord.

Isaiah 66: 15-24. The prophet makes it clear that, whatever blessings accrue in the golden future, they will be apportioned to those alone, who are the Israel of God, not merely by descent but in heart and life. They must be what the Apostle describes in Phil. 3: 3. Those who were bent on practising idolatrous rites, such as passing in procession, with priests as teachers, through gardens and groves devoted to impurity; or who, by partaking of the flesh of animals forbidden in the Levitical law, had become as Gentiles, must suffer with the heathen.

Verse 19 suggests that the restored Jewish remnant are to become the future missionaries of the world; and the book closes with a vision of the Holy City as the focus and center of the religious life of mankind. It is as though, like John, Isaiah beheld her descending from God out of heaven, with wide-open gates, through which the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor, v. 20. The lot of all enemies of goodness is depicted in the ever-burning fires of Tophet--the rubbish heaps of which are significant of uselessness, v. 24.

(The questions on Sections 36-77, to be found on pp 94, 95, will serve as a review at this point.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON ISAIAH

OUTLINE.

- (a) What distinguishing name is applied to Isaiah?
- (b) Into how many parts is his prophecy divided?
- (c) What chapters comprise the historical section?

INTRODUCTION.

- (d) Who were the kings of Judah during the period of Isaiah's ministry?
- (e) What is the tradition regarding his death?
- (f) What is the author's aim in the second section of the book?
- (g) What two agents are especially designated as the deliverers and restorers of Israel?

SECTIONS 1—35. CHAPTERS 1—12; 24—35.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. In what manner had Israel repaid the fatherly love of God?
2. What made the Temple services displeasing to God?
3. What was God's purpose in permitting disaster to overtake his Chosen People?
4. To what period of Isaiah's ministry do this and the four following chapters belong?
5. What does the prophet teach will be the effect of the manifestation of God's power and majesty?
6. What sins does he especially condemn?
7. Why was the harvest of wild grapes such a disappointment to the vine-dresser?
8. How does the prophet show the progress of sin?
9. What vision of the Lord's glory did Isaiah have?
10. What is the meaning of "Immanuel"?
11. What nation did King Ahaz call to his aid against his enemies?
12. Why was this unwise? Where could protection have been obtained?

13. What prophecies regarding Christ are given in chapter 9: 1-7?
14. What solemn responsibility rests on those who seek to lead others?
15. What picture is drawn of the desolation produced by sin?
16. What use did God make of Assyria? Why did Assyria nevertheless deserve punishment?
17. What hope was left for Israel?
18. Who is meant by the "rod out of the stem of Jesse"? How is the work of the Spirit described?
19. What will cause Israel to utter songs of thanksgiving?
20. What three sins are especially noted as provoking the judgments of God?
21. Why is the penalty of sin inescapable?
22. What causes the prophet to sing a song of praise?
23. What foundation must underlie perfect peace of soul?
24. What is taught regarding God's care of his people, even though they may be permitted to suffer? What verse encourages prayer for relief?
25. What nations are meant by the "swift serpent" and the "crooked serpent"? What was to be their fate? How is the Lord's care for his people symbolized?
26. What is the effect of drunkenness upon an individual or a nation?
27. To whom does the prophecy regarding "the precious corner-stone" refer?
28. Where did the Jews seek help against Assyria? What better way was open to them?
29. What two pictures does the prophet draw of Jehovah? To whom is his patience manifested? To whom his severity?
30. What was to be the state of the nation when instead of trusting foreign alliances they would depend wholly upon God?
31. What are the fruits of righteousness?
32. In what terms does the prophet foretell the downfall of Assyria's king?
33. What reward is promised to the righteous?
34. What is God's attitude toward persistent sin?
35. What is Isaiah's message to those whom the Lord redeems?

SECTIONS 26—77. CHAPTERS 40—66.

36. What is the first message brought by this herald of Jehovah? the second? What echo of hope is found in the third?
37. What description is given of the glory, the power, and the gentleness of the Saviour-God?
38. How does the prophet prove God's *ability* to sustain those who seek him?
39. By what name is Israel called? What promise does the Lord make?
40. What provision does the Lord make for the needy in spirit or in body?
41. What is to be the work of the Lord's chosen Servant? Who is this Servant?
42. What encouragement is there to trust in God even when he seems silent and afar off?
43. Whom does Jehovah summon as witnesses to his power to save?
44. How had Israel provoked and wearied God?
45. What promise does God make to the children of those who serve him?
46. How is the folly of idolatry shown?
47. How would God deal with Israel's sins?
48. What king does the prophet mention by name as chosen of God to deliver the Jews from Babylon?
49. How wide is the divine offer of salvation?
50. What contrast is drawn between Israel's God and the idols of Babylon?
51. What were the sins of Babylon which wrought its downfall?
52. How was the captivity a blessing to Israel?
53. Where and how does the first division of the second part of Isaiah close? Where is this concluding phrase repeated?
54. What is the measure of God's care for his people?
55. What is the ground of the prophet's confidence?
56. What encouragement to trust the Lord was afforded by Israel's past history?
57. Why should fear of enemies or circumstances be impossible for the people of God?
58. What picture is drawn of the return from Babylon? Instead of a foreign monarch who now is to reign over the nation?

59. Who is the suffering, rejected One of whom the prophet speaks? What would his suffering accomplish?
60. How long will God's loving-kindness last?
61. On what terms does God engage to bless his people?
62. By what name should the Temple be known?
63. What blessing does the Lord bestow on the forgiven soul that the wicked are unable to obtain?
64. What kind of a fast meets with God's approval?
What is true Sabbath-keeping?
65. What may cut off God's help from us?
66. How far should the fear of God's name extend?
67. What summons does Jerusalem receive? How is Zion to be glorified?
68. What spiritual blessings are typified by the glories of Zion?
69. What is to be the Messiah's mission? his Kingdom? his joy?
70. What new name will God bestow on Zion? Why?
71. Of what is Edom a symbol?
72. Who is the mighty Conqueror spoken of by the prophet?
73. How may man obstruct the salvation God wishes to bring?
74. For what does the prophet pray? What does he urge as reasons for God's mercy?
75. How did the Jews forfeit their place of privilege to the Gentiles?
76. What will be the character of the new heavens and earth?
77. Where is God's chosen home? With what vision does the prophecy of Isaiah conclude?

III
THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

OUTLINE OF JEREMIAH

THE PROPHET OF JUDAH'S DOWNFALL AND RESTORATION

- I. DENUNCIATION OF JUDAH1—33.
 - 1. *The Prophet's Call and Commission*1.
 - 2. *The Nation's Apostasy*2—20.
 - 3. *The Sins of Her Leaders*.....21—23.
 - 4. *The Impending Judgment*.....24—29.
 - 5. *The Promise of Restoration*.....30—33.
 - II. THE INFLICTION OF JUDGMENT.....34—45.
 - 1. *The Immediate Occasion of Judgment*34· 1—38: 28.
 - 2. *The Destruction of Jerusalem*....39.
 - 3. *The Wretched Condition of the Remnant*40—45.
 - III. PROPHECIES AGAINST THE NATIONS.....46—51.
 - 1. *Egypt*46.
 - 2. *Philistia*47.
 - 3. *Moab, Ammon, and Edom*48: 1—49: 22.
 - 4. *Syria and Elam*49: 23-39.
 - 5. *Babylon*50, 51.
- APPENDIX (from 2 Kings 24: 18—25:30).52.

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Jeremiah was of priestly descent, and born at Anathoth, a Levitical city a few miles northeast of Jerusalem. His commission was given him in very early life, and continued through the reigns of five kings for forty troubled years. He had neither wife nor child. His love was concentrated on his people, who ill requited it. The men of Anathoth sought his life. He was assailed with misrepresentation, bitter persecution, and murderous hate. He nearly lost his life under the displeasure of the king and princes, at whose command he was cast into a miry dungeon. He lived to see a faint gleam of returning prosperity overcast by the crimes of Ishmael and his fellow-conspirators.

He was a sensitive, delicately organized man, to whom it must have been a matter of peculiar trial to be called upon to play so prominent a part in those dark and stormy times, and to be "as an iron and brazen wall against the whole land." But he is an evidence of what may be done by a man in whom the Spirit of God resides in mighty, living force. Tradition states that he died in Egypt, stoned by his fellow-countrymen. It has been often said that there are few Old Testament saints who afford more points of likeness to our Lord than does Jeremiah.

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

1. Courage Promised to a Fearful Messenger.

Jeremiah 1. God has a distinct purpose for each life, and our one aim should be to discover and work out his plan. See Ps. 139:16; Gal. 1:15. The sanctification here referred to applies to office rather than to character, and means *set apart*. See John 17:19. Jeremiah was very young, and shrank from the responsibility of the great mission entrusted to him. Thus it has been with the noblest, Exod. 4:10. But that is godly fear indeed which casts us back on God. He never gives a commission without assuming the responsibility of its execution in, and with, or through, us. Powers of utterance are specially his gift, Isa. 6:7; Acts 6:10; 1 Cor. 1:5. The almond tree in Hebrew is the *wakeful* tree. It awakes from the winter sleep earlier than others, flowering in January and fruiting in March. It indicated the swiftness of God's movement. The boiling pot is the symbol of war. The promises of vs. 18, 19 are very precious to all who are called to stand in the breach and charge men with their sins.

2. Ungrateful Forgetfulness.

Jeremiah 2:1-8; 26-32. God regarded Israel as his bride, who had responded to his love, or as a vineyard and cornfield which were expected to yield their first fruits in response to the careful cultivation of the owner. Why had they failed to respond? For the answer let us question our own hearts. What marvels of perversity and disappointment we are! Who can understand or fathom the reason of our poor response to the yearning love of Christ! The heathen, in their punctilious devotion and lavish sacrifices at their idol-shrines, may well shame us. The root of the evil is disclosed in v. 31. We like to be lords, to assume

and hold the mastery of our lives. But God has been anything but a wilderness to us. He has given us ornaments, and we owe to his grace the garments of righteousness which he has put on us. In return we have forgotten him days without number, v. 32. Let us ask him to call us back—nay more, to draw us by the chains of love.

3. Pleading with Faithless Children.

Jeremiah 3:11--4:2. The people of the northern kingdom, to whom this appeal is especially addressed, were more excusable than Judah, because their privileges had been less. God judges us according to our opportunities. How precious the invitation and promise of v. 12! Confession is an essential condition that must be fulfilled by us. See 1 John 1:7. Zion shall yet be the center of a restored Israel, vs. 14 and 18. In vs. 21-25 the voices of the people in confession and prayer mingle with Jehovah's encouraging their return. When we lie down in broken-hearted shame and penitence, we are very near to being lifted to the bosom of God. Compare Jer. 3:25 with 4:1. The return of the Chosen People to the God of their fathers will be the cause of revival and quickening throughout the earth. Compare Jer. 4:2 with Rom. 11:12.

4. Widespread Corruption.

Jeremiah 5:1-6; 19-31. Diogenes, the cynic, was discovered one day in Athens in broad daylight, lantern in hand, looking for something. When someone remonstrated with him, he said that he needed all the light possible to enable him to find an honest man. Something like that is in the prophet's thought. God was prepared to spare Jerusalem on lower terms than even Sodom, and yet he was driven to destroy her. Both poor and rich had alike "broken the yoke and burst the bonds." The description of the onset of the Chaldeans is very graphic. They settle down upon the land as a flock of locusts, but still the Chosen People

refuse to connect their punishment with their sin. It never occurred to the Chosen People that the failure of the rain, the withering of their crops, and the assault of their foes, were all connected with their sin. There is nothing unusual in this obtuseness for as we read the history of our own times, men are equally inapt at connecting national disaster with national sin.

How good it would be if the national cry of today were that of v. 24: *Let us now fear before the Lord our God!* Notice the delightful metaphor of v. 22. When God would stay the wild ocean wave a barrier of sand will suffice. The martyrs were as sand grains but wild persecutions were quenched by their heroic patience.

5. False Promises of Peace.

Jeremiah 8:4-22. This chapter is filled with denunciation of the unreasonable and infatuated obstinacy of Israel. As the horse rushes madly to the fight, so were the people set on evil. The very birds that were sensitive to the laws of migration, and obeyed the call of the sunnier clime, were more impressible than the Chosen People. God often calls us out of the stormy winter blasts to lands of sunny fellowship, but we will not heed. From v. 10 onward we have a description of the desolation about to visit the land. Notwithstanding the promises of false prophets, the invader overran the country and the exiled people might readily begin to question why such a fate had befallen them. To this there was but one answer. Their sin had cut them off from God's protecting care. Is not this the reason why harvests pass and summers end, and the years roll on, and still you are not saved? There is balm for your wounds, and a physician for your healing, but you do not avail yourselves of them; and God's love is powerless, however greatly he desires to help you, until you return. The father would do anything for the prodigal, but he has no chance so long as the prodigal remains in the far-land.

6. National Perversity.

Jeremiah 9:1-16. Verses 1-6: Once the voice of joy and thanksgiving had been heard in Jerusalem, but now on every side there was bloodshed, and the patriot-prophet could only weep incessantly over the slain. A lodge in the wilderness seemed preferable to the most luxurious mansion in the city. Solitude would be better than association with the ungodly perpetrators of such crimes. Yet we must not go out of the fray so long as our Captain wants us to remain in it, in dependence upon him. *Verses 7-16:* What a magnificent description of the effect of God's judgments on the land! No bird, no beast, no lowing of cattle, but jackals gamboling over the ruins of Jerusalem. However fast we shut our doors and windows, death enters our homes. Neither palace nor cottage is exempted. There is no escape for young or old from the judgments of God, except in penitence and faith. The secret of national decay and overthrow is the same in all ages. The tree is rotten at the core before it falls beneath the hurricane. Let us turn to 1 Corinthians 1:18, which belongs to this chapter, and learn how little the wisdom and might of the world can avail us in the dread hour of universal desolation. Stand with the Crucified and glory in his Cross; be content to bear his reproach and shame, that you may become a son of the Resurrection, and be accounted worthy to escape those things that must come to pass, and at last stand before him.

7. The Folly of Idolatry.

Jeremiah 10:1-10; 19-25. Verses 1-10: We are here introduced into an idol-factory. Contrasted with the manufactured idols is the majesty of our God. There is none like him. His name is great in might, he is the King of the nations, the true and living God, and the everlasting King! Christian, fear not or be dismayed when enemies plot against you. It is a vain device that they frame. To hide in God is a sure defence from all that man can do for our hurt. O thou true and living

Saviour, in thy wounds harried and faithful souls become strong and brave again. *Verses 19-25:* The prophet now bids the people prepare for their captivity. Their city would be as when a shepherd removed his slight and insubstantial tent, leaving no trace. But Jeremiah's soul is lacerated and torn with the message he must needs announce. Are we called to be shepherds? Let us see to it that we seek the Lord; so only shall our flocks not be scattered, v. 21. Are we in perplexity as to our path in life? It is not for us to direct ourselves, but to look up for God's sure guidance, which will be given to the soul that waits for it, v. 23. Are we being corrected? Let us be patient; it is only when we endure without complaining that our trial works out the highest good, and God will not give us more than we can bear, v. 24.

8. The Penalty of a Broken Covenant.

Jeremiah 11:1-20. This and the following two chapters belong to the earlier ministry of Jeremiah, when he still dwelt in his native home of Anathoth. The prophet refers to the covenant which had been lately renewed by Josiah, 2 Kings 22 and 23, and quotes largely from the book of Deuteronomy, which had been recently read in the hearing of the people. To that covenant the prophet reverently gives his endorsement, v. 5. His amen reminds us of Him who is God's Amen, and in whom all the promises of God are ratified forever, 2 Cor. 1:20. Shall we not learn, like our Lord in Matthew 11:26, to look into the Father's face and say, "Even so?" We must do so, that one day we may join with the redeemed in crying, "Amen, Hallelujah," Rev. 19:4.

The repeated relapses of Israel into idolatry were in part due to the licentious rites associated with such worship. The people were seduced from their allegiance to Jehovah by the fascination of passion; and herein we are reminded of the many times that we have been beguiled into sinful thoughts and imaginings, in spite of

God's earnest solicitations and protestation, "rising early and protesting." As long as the soul is wedded to its evil ways, it is impervious to the entrance of God's light and love. "There is a sin unto death," says the Apostle, "I do not say that he shall pray for it," a saying which is closely akin to the solemn prohibition of v. 14, "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them."

9. The Parable of the Girdle.

Jeremiah 13:1-11, 20-25. This parable of the girdle may really have been transacted. By some such striking symbol before them the attention of *the people* must have been powerfully arrested. Or, it may be that this is only a vivid style of presentation. Whichever it is, the chief idea is the intimacy of relationship between the Chosen People and their God, v. 11. Oh, that he would cause us to cleave to him! The degradation of the best produces the worst, and nothing more strikingly sets forth the condition to which those may sink who have abused the highest possibilities, than the condition of this marred and profitless girdle. Let us beware! since capable of God's best and highest, we are also liable to the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Jerusalem is apostrophized, and asked where was the beautiful flock of sister and daughter towns which had gathered under her lead. They had been destroyed, and their people were in captivity. Their destruction had come from those who had been allies and friends, v. 21; but their sin was so deeply seated and inveterate that such a fate was inevitable. There was no hope of reformation, v. 23. It was easier to expect a negro to become white, or for a leopard to change his spots than that Israel should do good. Only Christ can do this for us. He can with a word arrest a Niagara in its fall and bid it leap back. His grace can cause the leprosy of inbred sin to cease its hold, never again to pollute the soul.



JEREMIAH DENOUNCES THE PRIESTS. Jeremiah 23: 1-4.

From Painting by Max Lieberow. Modern German Artist.

10. Human and Divine Help Contrasted.

Jeremiah 17:1-14. The Jews were always seeking alliance either with Egypt or Babylon. What was true of them applies to us all; but we cannot depend upon human aid, without departing from the Lord. The *heath* is probably the juniper, a lonely tree, dwelling in arid wastes, unvisited by dew. The soul that rests on God is watered from his throne. The roots of such are fed from the hidden springs of Eternity. The heart is *deceitful*; it tends constantly to substitute the arm of flesh for the living God. *Desperately wicked* means "incurably sick." It was the ancient notion that the partridge stole the eggs of other birds and hatched them as her own. The covetous man is sure to reap disappointment. He steals other people's goods, but is driven off the nest before they hatch out for the benefit of himself. God's glorious throne is a defense to all who trust him; while those who depart from him shall be forgotten, as a sentence written in the sand is obliterated by the next puff of wind. Contrast Job 19:23, 24.

11. Shepherds That Mislead God's Flock.

Jeremiah 23:1-12; 23-32. It is God's purpose to care for his people through shepherds (pastors) who are responsible to him. Jesus our Lord is the Branch into which we may be grafted. He is our King who saves us and clothes us with his own spotless righteousness. God finds us in him, Phil. 3:9. Because he reigns, we are saved and dwell in safety. When we are brought into contact with false shepherds, whether the failure be in doctrine or example, let us ask for the broken heart of v. 9.

God is everywhere present; as the latter paragraph indicates, he is near at hand to overhear the blasphemy of those who deride religion, and to be a very present help in time of trouble. If he fills heaven and earth, can he not fill thy heart? If his Word is like fire, let it cleanse thee! If it is as a hammer, let it pulverize thy

pride! Let those of us who essay to teach and preach, not steal our words from our neighbors, or utter our own, but receive them from the source of all truth.

12. Two Baskets of Figs.

Jeremiah 21. These two baskets represent the different fates that overlook the people at the fall of Jerusalem. The good figs in the first were those who were taken to Babylon with Jeremiah. It was *for their good* that they were transplanted, v. 5. How often we are led into captivity for the same reason. With bitter regrets we turn our backs on our early home, the scenes of our youth, and the faces we have loved. Sometimes we are carried into a strange land, where we find it impossible to sing the Lord's song. But in the absence of all creature aid we find God drawing near to substitute restoration for destruction, building up for pulling down, and planting for uprooting.

Have we profited by our discipline? If so we are as the ripe figs of June, sweet to the taste of the owner who searches beneath the leaves of profession. Let those who congratulate themselves on their immunity from the troubles that have overtaken others, ponder vs. 8-10. In the light of Hebrews 12:9, immunity from chastisement is not to be sought after. The residue of the Jews drifted to their hurt. See Jer. 41 and 42.

13. An Everlasting Love.

Jeremiah 31:1-9, 15-34. It is all-inclusive: *all the families of Israel*. It is patient under provocation: during forty years it bore with Israel. It has a drawing-power which overcomes our obduracy. It longs to restore the old joyous confidence and freedom: *thou shalt go forth in the dances of them that make ready*. It will never rest till it has broken down misunderstandings and alienation, so that even Ephraim shall propose to worship at Mount Zion. It meets the heart: *they shall come with weeping*. It sets the blind by rivers of waters, and the blind and the lame in a straight way. The effect

of such love is still further described in vs. 18, 19—we bemoan our sins with profound remorse. These words, which were so sweet to the prophet, v. 26, are yet to be fulfilled; but in the meantime the covenant is for us all and each one may claim the fulfillment of the *I wills* of vs. 33, 34. See Matt. 26: 28; Heb. 8: 8.

14. A Lesson from the Rechabites.

Jeremiah 35. Among the refugees from the neighboring country who sought asylum within the walls of Jerusalem, was a group of Arabs, known as Rechabites. Probably they encamped in one of the open spaces. They clung tenaciously to the regulations promulgated by Jonadab some three hundred years before. See Judges 1: 16; 2 Kings 10: 15; 1 Chron. 2: 55. They drank no wine, did not cultivate the ground, and lived in tents. We do well not to touch alcohol; not to strike our roots too deeply into this world, where we are pilgrims and strangers; and to cultivate the pilgrim spirit, which looks for and travels toward the city that hath foundations. Israel had not been as true to the divine precepts as the Rechabites to those of their founder. Therefore the Chosen People would be dispossessed and scattered; while the Rechabites have preserved their independence to the present day. Obedience is the only source of permanence. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

15. A Vain Attempt To Destroy God's Word.

Jeremiah 36. These written words had been directly given from God, v. 18. The fast was instituted to seek divine help in the approaching conflict with Nebuchadnezzar. But of what good is a fast while the evils of apostasy and disobedience are unredressed? It was against these that Jeremiah protested; and his words were read to a vast concourse of people by Baruch his faithful friend. It was the month of December, and the royal chamber was warmed by a brazier of burning charcoal. As Jehudi read, the godless king cut the roll with a penknife and consigned it to the fire. All down

the ages false priests have dealt thus with the Word that condemned them. But a sailor does not escape shipwreck by destroying the chart which indicates the rocks on which he is drifting. God's words are eternal, though the material on which they are written may perish. He who rejects God's truth does so at his peril, while God hides his faithful servants in the secret of his presence, secure from the attacks of enemies.

(From the book of Lamentations, usually attributed to Jeremiah, a single selection is taken.)

The Meaning of Affliction.

Lamentations 3:22-36. This book is remarkable for its variety of touching images. The prophet seems to stand amid the ruins of city and temple, burned with fire, strewn with the ashes of his people. This paragraph, however, is in marked contrast to the rest of the book, containing, as it does, a gleam of hope. If only we would turn from our griefs to the mercies, compassions, and goodness of the Lord, there would be light in our darkest dungeons. It is good to hope and quietly wait; to take Christ's yoke and learn of him; to keep silent in submission and faith. God cannot cast off. He does not willingly afflict; he has no sympathy or complicity with the turning of a man aside or subverting his cause. Let us be at least sure of this, that the Lord will neither cast out nor cast off. He may hide his face for a moment, but with everlasting kindness he will have mercy, according to the multitude of his compassions.

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON JEREMIAH

OUTLINE.

- (a) What are the three main divisions of the book?
- (b) How much of the book is concerned with Judah?
- (c) Against what other nations did Jeremiah prophesy?

INTRODUCTION.

- (d) Of what descent was Jeremiah?
- (e) When was his prophetic commission given to him and how long did it continue?

SECTIONS 1—15. SELECTIONS FROM CHAPTERS 1—36.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. What commission was entrusted to Jeremiah? How was he encouraged to fulfill it?
2. To whom did Jehovah first send the prophet? What was Judah's sin?
3. What invitation was Jeremiah to extend to the Northern Kingdom? What was the necessary condition to forgive men?
4. What picture is drawn of the corruption of Jerusalem?
5. In what way was Israel deluded? How could the nation have avoided the threatened evil?
6. What is the secret of national decay and overthrow in all ages?
7. How does Jeremiah describe the folly of idolatry?
8. What covenant had Jeremiah made with Israel? By whom had it been broken?
9. What was the parable of the girdle intended to teach?
10. What contrast is drawn between human and divine help?
11. What does God expect of the shepherds of his flock?
12. What was the lesson of the two baskets of figs?
13. What new covenant will God make with his people?
14. Who were the Rechabites and why did they refuse to drink wine?
15. Who attempted to destroy the roll of Jeremiah's prophecy? How was this iniquity punished?

IV

THE BOOKS OF EZEKIEL AND DANIEL

OUTLINES

OUTLINE OF EZEKIEL

THE PROPHET OF ISRAEL IN EXILE

- I. PROPHECIES REGARDING ISRAEL.....1—24.
 - 1. *The Prophet's Call and Commission*1—3.
 - 2. *The Siege of Jerusalem*.....4, 5.
 - 3. *Israel Past and Present*.....6—24.
- II. PROPHECIES REGARDING THE NATIONS..25—32.
 - 1. *Ammon, Moab, and Philistia*..25.
 - 2. *Tyre and Sidon*26—28.
 - 3. *Egypt*29—32.
- III. PROPHECIES REGARDING ISRAEL'S FUTURE33—48.
 - 1. *The Fall of Jerusalem*33: 1—34: 10.
 - 2. *The Restoration of Israel*.34: 11—39: 29.
 - 3. *The New Temple*40—48.

OUTLINE OF DANIEL

THE PROPHET OF WORLD-EMPIRES

- I. HISTORICAL SECTION1—6.
 - 1. *Daniel and His Friends Tested*1.
 - 2. *Nebuchadnezzar's Forgotten Dream* ...2.
 - 3. *The Golden Image and the Fiery Furnace*3.

4. *Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream*4.
5. *Belshazzar's Feast and Downfall*5.
6. *Daniel Delivered from the Den of Lions*6.

II. PROPHETICAL SECTION7—12

1. *The Vision of the Four Beasts*7.
2. *The Vision of the Ram and the He-Goat* ..8.
3. *Daniel's Prayer for Jerusalem and the Answer*9.
4. *Daniel's Vision by the River Hiddekel* ..10.
5. *The Conflict of Nations*.....11.
6. *The Last Judgment*12.

INTRODUCTIONS

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

Ezekiel's name means, "God will strengthen." Like Jeremiah he was a priest as well as a prophet. He lived among the Jews who were carried away captive by Nebuchadnezzar and settled on the river Chebar, in the north of Mesopotamia. He began to prophesy about six years before Jerusalem was destroyed; and was therefore contemporary with Jeremiah, prophesying partly before and partly after the destruction of Jerusalem.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Daniel and Jonah differ from the other prophets in that their work was among foreign peoples. Their books are also unlike the other books of prophecy, in that they are largely historical. In both books, also, the supernatural element is unusually prominent.

Daniel was a prophet-statesman and his book deals with Babylon and the empires which should follow it until the coming of the divine kingdom. Of its twelve chapters the first six are narrative, the remainder are devoted to visions. From 2:4—7:28 the Aramaic language is employed; the opening and concluding sections are written in Hebrew. The latter part of the book is written in the first person, and as its unity is not disputed, the whole is to be ascribed to Daniel himself.

It opens with an account of the captivity of Daniel and his three friends, their fearless loyalty to the faith of their

fathers, and their advancement in royal favor. While the heroic faith of his friends is manifested in their deliverance from the fiery furnace, Daniel himself is the prominent character in the history. He is distinguished for his ability not only to interpret dreams and visions but to reproduce such as had been forgotten. In his later life, after Babylon had passed into the hands of Persia, Daniel's courage and faith received striking witness in his deliverance from the den of lions. This is the last recorded event in his life.

The symbolical visions which form the latter half of the book, with the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (chapter 2), set forth the successive establishment of four empires: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The last empire then gives way to smaller kingdoms until the setting up of the kingdom of God, which is to include all the dominions of the earth.

In the vision of a future kingdom of righteousness, the book is at one with all prophecy. In this kingdom even the dead shall share, being raised from the dust of the earth to everlasting life. Much as there is in the book that is hard to understand, the prophecy of Daniel has always ministered to Christian faith, and the climax of its visions is still the hope of the Church.

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

1. A Vision of God's Majesty.

Ezekiel 1:1-21. A dark storm-cloud approaches the prophet, from which an incessant blaze of lightning scintillated. As it drew near, the forms of four living creatures became visible, combining, under various figures, intelligence, strength, patience, and soaring aspiration. The wheels were evidently symbolical of the cycles of divine providence, which co-operate with the ministers of the divine will. The slab of blue expanse supported a human semblance, suggestive of that great after-event—God manifest in the flesh. The whole conception impresses us with the reality, order, majesty, and humanness, of the Eternal God. Those holy beings surely represent the intelligent company of innumerable angels and servants, while the wheels represent the material creation. All these are sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. Angels and nature minister to us, if we are in union with God. All things serve the servants of the Most High.

2. A Hard Commission.

Ezekiel 2:1—3:11. The people were impudent and stiff-hearted; their words as briars and thorns; their speech like the poison of scorpions; but the prophet was commissioned to go on with his divine mission, undeterred by their opposition. Under such circumstances we must be sure of a *Thus saith the Lord*. But no man can stand against the continual opposition of his fellows, unless his strength is renewed, as Ezekiel's was, by eating that which God gives. *Open thy mouth, and eat that which I give thee*, v. 8. Let us specially consider the divine denunciations of sin, that our words may be sharper than any two-edged sword. Nothing makes us so strong as feeding perpetually upon the roll of the

Book, and especially on the Word within the words. We must eat the flesh and drink in the life of the Son of man, if we can deal aright with the needs of the sons of men.

3. The Watchman's Responsibility.

Ezekiel 3:12-27. He was bitter because of his message, but hot because God's fire was burning within him. It is a blessed thing for preacher, leader, or Christian worker, when the hand of God is strong upon the soul. But whatever your inward condition, you will never be able to do your best work, unless you can sit where the people sit. In other words you must take their attitude, know by experience their circumstances, and share their lot. We must live very near to God, or we shall never hear the word of his mouth. There is no other way of obtaining messages that will effect his purpose. Ponder again v. 17. In v. 20 God is said to lay a stumbling-block only in the sense that he has constituted the world in that way. When the prophet went forth into the plain God revealed himself. Whether he bids us go to the plain, or shut ourselves in the house, the place of obedience and duty will ever be the right one for the manifestation of his glory and the communication of his message. The secret of a successful ministry is to be absolutely yielded in thought and in speech to God.

4. A New Heart Promised.

Ezekiel 11:5-25. The Spirit of God led the prophet to the East Gate of the Temple, where the Shekinah had settled, Ezek. 10:19. There he uttered the divine verdict on the priesthood. They had ridiculed Jeremiah's letter to the captives, among whom Ezekiel lived, Jer. 29:5; and had made merry at his comparison between the city and a caldron, Jer. 1:13. It was to these scornful men that Ezekiel uttered the scathing denunciations of vs. 7-18. The sudden death of Pelatiah, the ringleader of the scorners, gave terrible emphasis to the prophet's words. Ezekiel was told to look for his true kinsmen not among the doomed priesthood, but among his fellow-exiles whom



THE VISION OF EZEKIEL. Ezekiel 1: 1-10.

From Painting by RAPHAEL. Italian Artist.



they of Jerusalem despised. Spiritual ties must supersede natural ones, when the two clash. They might be far removed from the outer Temple, but God would be their asylum and sanctuary. What a sweet promise verse 16 provides for those who are compelled to go far from home! They may always meet their dear ones in God. Note the inclusive promise of v. 19—unity, newness, and sensitiveness to the least touch of the divine nature.

5. Reaping as We Sow.

Ezekiel 14: 1-6, 12-23. It is useless to approach God with prayers and inquiries for guidance, as long as our hearts are filled with secret sins and cherished idols. If we regard iniquity in our hearts God cannot hear us. It often happens when men purpose a certain evil course, that everything seems to favor them. For a striking example of this, see 1 Kings 22: 6, 15. The second paragraph describes the inveteracy of their sin. Jeremiah had affirmed that Judah's guilt was too great to be pardoned upon the intercession of Moses or of Samuel, Jer. 14: 2; 15: 1. Ezekiel adds three other revered names. In the four hypothetical cases of famine, noisome beasts, the sword, and pestilence, such men would succeed only in saving their own lives; but even in such cases there would be an elect remnant, who would be comforted as they recognized the evidences of the divine rectitude. Yes, as we look back on the history of our race we shall be comforted; we shall feel that God could have done no other; we shall reap the blessing which has been evolved out of events and movements that we had misunderstood or feared.

6. The Reversal of the Divine Judgment.

Ezekiel 18: 14-32. The Jews of Ezekiel's day asserted that God's dealings with their nation were not just, because they were suffering, not for their own sins, but for their fathers'. God here makes it clear that he deals with individuals according to their deserts. The guilty

son of a good father does not escape punishment because of his father's virtues; and the good son of evil parents reaps the reward of his own goodness. What a well of comfort is supplied by vs. 21 and 22! God pledges himself that forgiven sin shall not even be mentioned. This solemn covenant should be appropriated and its fulfillment claimed, by those who through all their lifetime have been subject to bondage because of their past. We must not be content with an outward amendment; there must be, and there can be, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, an inward and radical change. This impossible command drives us to the Holy Spirit, Ps. 51: 10, 12. As Augustine puts it: "Give what thou requirest, and require what thou wilt."

7. "Why Will Ye Die?"

Ezekiel 33: 1-16. The prophet depicts the peasantry of a fertile valley as engaged in pastoral pursuits. It is a peaceful, happy scene; but, creeping through the mountain passes, are their deadliest foes. How necessary that there should be a watchman, trumpet in hand, to give notice; and how unspeakable his guilt if he forbear to sound a warning! We are not responsible for those who refuse to take warning from our announcements, faithfully given; but if we perceive a soul in mortal danger and forbear to warn it, we are not only responsible for its ruin, but we bring awful retribution upon ourselves. Well might Richard Baxter lie awake at night beneath his awful sense of responsibility for the souls of men. God desires our salvation. If only the sinner will confess his sins to the faithful and merciful High Priest, and make such restitution as he can, not one of his sins shall be remembered against him.

8. Selfish Shepherds.

Ezekiel 34: 1-16. The shepherds of this chapter were not the religious leaders of the people, but *rulers* who sought in their government not the good of the people

but their own selfish ends. But the statements made by the prophet may be rightly applied to rapacious priests who care more for the fleece than for the flock. Pastors are required to lead the flock of God not for filthy lucre but as examples for the sheep, 1 Pet. 5: 2, 3. It is their duty, also, to strengthen the spiritually diseased, heal the sick, bind up the broken in heart, and seek the lost.

Notice the tender manner in which the Lord Jesus himself supplies the deficiencies of his unfaithful servants. In beautiful contrast to their selfish cruelty and rapacity, he sets himself in cloudy and dark days to gather and tend his people, though they had been as scattered sheep, each taking his own way. When the ministers of his Church fail in their duty, the Lord hastens to supply their lack. Without doubt these gracious promises refer primarily to the Lord's Second Advent, when he will seek out and deliver his Chosen People, and bring them to their own land. But surely we must not limit the reference thus. We are his sheep, by purchase and by choice. He knows us, as we know him. He has sought and saved us. He feeds us and causes us to lie down beside the waters of rest.

9. "Showers of Blessing."

Ezekiel 34:17-31. Though God now often seems to make no difference between the oppressors and the oppressed, the time is fast coming when he will make momentous and lasting distinctions, Matt. 25: 32, 33. No wrong shall then be unredressed. Note the designation of our Lord as "the One Shepherd," peerless and matchless in dignity and authority. Once he died to save his flock from the wolf, but he is destined to reign forever as their Great Shepherd in the midst of them, v. 24. They shall be everlastingly exempted from hunger, harm, and reproach. Jesus has been raised up from the dead to be our plant of renown. Planted in the grave of death, he has become with his faithful people a Vine, whose shadow covers the hills, and enriches the hearts and lives of men with luscious fruit. And because he lives,

we shall live also. His resurrection implies and guarantees our own.

10. The Resurrection of a Dead Nation.

Ezekiel 37:1-14. A marvelous chapter—the vision is so graphic. Time does not rob it of its significance. Indeed every sign points to speedy fulfillment. The Jewish nation has long resembled those dry and bleaching bones; and the state of sinners generally may truly be described in the same terms. The condition of many souls and neighborhoods is comparable to the harrowing scenes of a recent battle-field. We may preach so as to effect an outward revolution, but there can be no life until the divine breath passes over them. We must preach the Word, instant in season and out; but we must also call on the Spirit of Life. Those that are in their graves must hear the voice of the Son of God. The promises of vs. 13 and 14 await literal fulfillment in the case of the Jews, but let us plead that they may be also realized in our own congregations and neighborhoods. Revival will assuredly end in unity.

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON EZEKIEL

OUTLINE.

- (a) Into how many parts is this prophecy divided?
- (b) How are the first and last parts connected?
- (c) What is the theme of the second part?

INTRODUCTION.

- (d) What is the meaning of the name Ezekiel?
- (e) What do we know of his personal history?

SECTIONS 1—10. SELECTIONS FROM CHAPTERS 1—37.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. How was the divine majesty revealed to Ezekiel in a vision?
2. What commission did Ezekiel receive and how was he strengthened to perform it?
3. What is the meaning of the parable of the watchman?
4. How would God bless his people who were separated from the Temple?
5. How may our secret thoughts hinder God from answering our prayers?
6. For whose sin does God hold us responsible?
7. What hope is given to the wicked and what warning to the righteous?
8. What is the duty of a shepherd toward his flock? How is the selfish shepherd reproved?
9. What promises of blessing are given God's flock? Who is meant by "my servant David"?
10. What alone could make the dry bones live? What explanation of the vision does the Lord God give to Ezekiel?

THE BOOK OF DANIEL

1. Moral Courage Rewarded.

Daniel 1. These young men of noble Jewish families were brought to Babylon to receive education for the civil service. Their names were altered to break, so far as possible, their connection with the past. The food provided probably contravened Leviticus 3:17. According to the usual custom it had been presented before an idol, 1 Cor. 8:10. Note those words: *Daniel purposed in his heart.* It is all important to resolve in one's heart that certain things are not possible for us. Too many of us have a secret reserve. We barricade the front door but leave the back door on the latch. We ought to realize the extent to which Paul referred when he said, "*dead to sin.*" God always co-operates with his servants when they are true to him. *He* brought Daniel into favor; *he* gave him skill; *he* caused his face and that of his three friends, to bear the hue of health. Let us trust him to do his part! This is the secret of continuance, v. 21.

2. The Forgotten Dream.

Daniel 2:1-13. This was the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's sole reign. At first he was joint-governor with his father. From v. 4b to 7:28 the Syriac language is employed, and as this was the vernacular tongue of the king and his court, it is possible that this part of Daniel's record is based upon documents of state. The king's argument throughout his discussion with the magicians and astrologers, was that if they could not recall the past, they certainly could not be trusted to foretell the future; and the failure of the wise-men provided the opportunity for the greater triumph of the servant of God. The wise-men of Babylon said truly that only the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh, could recover lost dreams. Daniel thought so, too, only he

looked to the Lord God of his fathers. Irresponsible power is a temptation to the ruler, and perilous to the ruled. No mortal should have despotic power over life and death. But a movement is afoot in our times which is likely to give to all nations what Abraham Lincoln described as, "government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

3. Wisdom Granted in the Hour of Need.

Daniel 2: 14-35. The action of Daniel in this supreme crisis is very instructive. He reckoned absolutely on God, and in his chivalrous endeavor to save the lives of the aged men, the heads of the college in which he had been trained, he never doubted that God would be his stay. A prayer meeting was convened to ask for the merciful interposition of the God of heaven, and at its close Daniel seems to have lain down to sleep in unwavering faith. In this act we are reminded of Jesus sleeping amid the storm. Only a heart so pure and true, so trustful and godly, could have slept within the shadow of so terrible a menace. It was *in a night-vision* that he beheld the majestic procession of empire, from the gold of absolute monarchy to the clay and metal of constitutional government. Note his care to give all the glory to God and to take the humble position of the mere channel through which the divine message was transmitted to the king.

4. God's Kingdom Triumphant.

Daniel 2: 36-49. Our Lord probably refers to these five empires when he speaks of "the times of the Gentiles." The empire of Babylon was followed by that of Medo-Persia under Cyrus; that by Greece under Alexander the Great; and that in turn by Rome led by the Cæsars. Since the dissolution of the Roman Empire, the vast dominions of the East and the West have fallen, generally speaking, into some ten main divisions. There is, therefore, now nothing between us and the final setting up of the kingdom that is not made by human

hands and shall never be destroyed. Note the striking anticipation of the outcome of Gentile dominion, in the prostration of supreme human power at the feet of a Jew. Evidently Daniel refused the king's homage, because we are told that Nebuchadnezzar "answered" him. Those who have shared our anxieties and prayers must not be forgotten in our hour of triumph, v. 49. The heart of man may not be able to recall its forgotten dreams of innocence and truth, but it will recognize them when presented by the servant of God.

5. Loyalty Severely Tested.

Daniel 3:1-18. The king, at the close of the foregoing chapter, acknowledged the supremacy of Daniel's God, yet here he erects an image to Bel and to himself, demanding divine honor. Probably there was state policy in this. In so heterogeneous an empire of peoples, nations, and languages, there could be no unity but in universal prostration before one and the same object. Nineteen years had elapsed since the recovery of the lost dream. In that period successful wars had been waged and vast treasures accumulated which made this vast expenditure possible. Imagine the assembled myriads, the glittering array of princes, satraps, viceroys, statesmen, and priests, the grouped bands, and in the background the furnace. The three youths could not have stood alone amid the prostrate throng, had they not been supported by a living faith in the God of their fathers, Heb. 11:33, 34. They would not argue, but they could die, if God willed. Their attitude must be taken and maintained altogether apart from any expectation of deliverance. Our God whom we serve is able—and he will.

6. Loyalty Rewarded.

Daniel 3:19-30. It is only when we reach the fire that we become aware of the presence of the divine Companion, walking beside us as if treading the dew-besprinkled glades of Paradise. The Good Shepherd was

there with his rod and staff. *Loose*, v. 25, that is, the fire had consumed their bonds and nothing else. Hair would soonest catch the flame, but not a hair perished, Luke 12: 7; 21: 18. The yielded body of v. 28 reminds us of Romans 6: 13; 12: 1, 2. Let us yield our bodies and souls to our faithful Creator for him to use as he will. He made and redeemed, let him have; and when we are possessed by his Spirit, all other fires, whether physical or temperamental, fail to hurt. Of the martyrs, it may be said that upon them also the fire had no power, Isa. 43: 2!

7. "The Decree of the Watchers."

Daniel 4: 1-18. Nebuchadnezzar was in the zenith of his fame and power. His wars were over; his prosperity was assured. But he attributed all to his own wisdom and prowess. There was no thought of God, who had raised him up and given him everything. He must be humbled, if his soul was to be saved; and the whole living world must know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever he pleases, v. 17. How gladly worldly men turn in hours of crisis to religious men, who draw upon unseen resources, and bear themselves with calm and unruffled peace, v. 9. The greatness of the King is set forth under the figure of a mighty tree, filling the earth and sheltering the nations. There was only one Being who came down, combining in himself watchfulness and holiness. In v. 17 we learn that no destiny is decided apart from the careful sifting of the celestial council-chamber. How august is this conception of the matured judgment of heaven. Where should we stand apart from the pleading of the great High Priest?

8. Nebuchadnezzar's Humiliation.

Daniel 4: 19-37. Beyond doubt Nebuchadnezzar was one of the most illustrious princes the world has ever seen. The discoveries which Layard commenced among the mounds of the Euphrates valley have afforded strik-

ing evidences of his magnificence. Nebuchadnezzar was very conscious of his greatness, and as he looked from the eminence of his throne upon the world at his feet, his heart was lifted up with pride. It would be easy to cite proofs from the stones and bricks of Babylon to corroborate the general tenor of this story; for all the bricks of the ruins in that great province, so far as they have been examined, bear the name of Nebuchadnezzar; and several inscriptions have been found which, in their boastfulness, tally exactly with v. 30. But how marvelous the contrast between those proud and vaunting words, and the ascriptions of humble homage and praise in vs. 34-37! If God could produce such a result on the haughty king of Babylon, is there any sinner he cannot subdue? May not the stern discipline to which some lives are subjected be intended to subdue their proud wills and bring them to similar confessions?

9. The Handwriting on the Wall.

Daniel 5: 1-16. The name of Belshazzar has been deciphered in inscriptions found at Babylon, from which it is inferred that he was associated with his father in the kingdom, and was left to defend Babylon. He was therefore a grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, the word "father," v. 11, being used in the sense of "ancestor." The great walls of the banqueting hall covered with sculptures and sumptuous decorations; the tablets covered by cuneiform descriptions of the triumphs of former kings; what a feast this was! The thousand lords; the most beautiful women of the land; the concourse of magnates of religion and the state. The wine flowed in rivers, and laughter rang through the vaulted hall. Upon the table stood the vessels of the Temple, and notably the seven-branched candlestick, which cast its radiance on the wall, clearly illumining the fingers of the hand that wrote. The words, though Chaldee, may have been written in Hebrew characters. Conscience anticipated Daniel, and filled the king's heart with foreboding. The queen may have been the great Nitocris, wife of Nebu-

chadnezzar, the ancestor of the present king. God has his own way of bringing his people to the front when he needs them.

10. Weighed and Found Wanting.

Daniel 5: 17-31. Daniel was unperturbed and undismayed. Calm and collected, he recognized his Father's handwriting, and read it, as the instructed may decipher a scroll which is illegible to the ordinary gaze. What to him were the gewgaws of the palace? With the wings of the angel of death overshadowing that awe-struck throng, it was of small importance that Belshazzar promised him the purple robe and chain of gold. It seems sometimes as though those fingers were busy still writing their awful sentence on the walls of national revelry. While a nation is drinking deep at its cups and countenancing uncleanness, the divine assay may be in progress and the verdict going forth: *weighed and found wanting*. There may be gold and glitter, revelry and mirth, the splendor of state, and the profusion of rich viands; but what of these if the people are ignorant, irreligious, and impure? Then, indeed, dry-rot has set in! The root sin of all is pride. May the Spirit of God, who ever brings with him light and understanding and excellent wisdom be found in us, as in Daniel.

11. Fidelity in Worship.

Daniel 6: 1-15. Though he was the most distinguished man of his day, and full of public business, Daniel managed to find time for prayer, in the evening, morning, and at noon, according to the Hebrew custom, Ps. 55: 17. He was outwardly a great magnate of the Persian court, but inwardly he was as true as ever to the city of his fathers and to the Temple now in ruins, v. 10. What a marvelous tribute was afforded to his saintly character by his foes, when they could find no fault in him except as concerned his religious life! Time spent in prayer is not lost time to the suppliant. Luther used to say: "I have so much to do today that I cannot get through with

less than three hours of prayer." It was customary for the Jews to turn the face toward the Holy City, which for so long had been the center of their great religious system, 1 Kings 8:44; Jonah 2:4. With us, the upturned face and the references we make to the great High Priest, are significant of a posture of soul analagous and yet superior to the open window. See to it that your windows are always open towards the New Jerusalem, of which you are a citizen, but from which for a little while you are exiled.

12. "Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake."

Daniel 6:16-28. The plot was an atrocious one, but it hurt its perpetrators more than the victim of their vindictive hatred, v. 24. They dug a pit into which they fell themselves. They thought to flatter the king, and secure Daniel's fall; but their stratagems were like the mines laid at the mouth of a harbor, which are more perilous to those who set them than to others. Still God sends his angels to shut the lions' mouths, that they may not hurt his people, strongly conscious of uprightness before God and man. It is not necessary to suppose that Daniel saw the angel any more than we behold the horses and chariots in the mountains around us. Dare to believe that the ministering angels, though unseen, engirdle you and intercept the blows and plots of your adversaries. Walk before God in righteousness and peace, and be sure that you are immortal till your work is done. That a heathen king should publish such a proclamation is a glimpse into the divine wisdom that can make his mighty power known by the strangest circumstances.

13. God's Everlasting Dominion.

Daniel 7:1-14. This chapter enumerates the succession of world-empires and rulers which bridge the gulf of centuries from the Captivity to the Second Advent. The lion represents Babylon, whose cruel and mighty kingdom was animated by marvelous intelligence; the bear, Persia; the leopard, Greece under Alexander the



DANIEL WITH THE LIONS. Daniel 6: 12-17.

From Painting by BRITON RIVIERE. Modern British Artist.

Great; and the fourth beast, with great iron teeth, Rome. The ten horns are ten kings, and these probably represent great European kingdoms which have succeeded, or may yet succeed, to the heritage of the Roman empire. The Ancient of Days is sitting today upon his throne, his snow-white raiment betokening his purity, the fire of his throne bespeaking his antagonism to all things that offend and work iniquity. The government of the world is on shoulders which are well able to carry it, and he will cause all things to work out his purpose, which is to promote and assure the glory of Christ.

14. The Destruction of All Rival Powers.

Daniel 7: 15-28. The judgment described here is not the last judgment, but that of the nations, which is always in process and in virtue of which one great empire after another is set aside. This constant change must continue until the kingdom of Jesus Christ, which is now a spiritual and hidden one, shall be set up before the eyes of men. This dread persecuting power has been identified with Antiochus and others. But it is better to think of it as that spirit of evil, which is always at war with the people of God, assuming different phases in its manifestation. It may be that as God's people have suffered from Antichrist in the past, so they may expect some last manifestation of such hatred. But they shall overcome by the blood of Jesus and the word of their testimony, and the kingdom of Christ shall survive the wreck of all others. What a glimpse is afforded of the awful conflict which must go on between the saints of the Most High and the great world-powers which desire to wear them out! Are we not now witnessing the judgment of God which is being executed on the nations of the earth?

15. God's Sanctuary Dishonored.

Daniel 8: 1-14. Shushan was the lily palace. There, by the river Ulai, the prophet beheld in vision the attack which would subsequently be made on the Medo-Persian

kingdom by Alexander. The great horn which was broken is, of course, Alexander, and the four notable ones are his four generals, who after his death divided up his conquests. The little horn is referred by many to Antiochus, whose conflict with the Maccabees was one of the most significant in later Jewish history. Others refer it to Mohammed and his followers, who have reigned over the same regions. In this case the little horn would stand for the Eastern apostasy as distinguished from the Western, which is said to be represented by the little horn of the fourth beast, 7: 8. The Books of the Maccabees, included in the Apocrypha, should be studied to understand more clearly what is intended in vs. 11, 12. The explanation of these obscure verses is also given in vs. 24, 25. Antiochus was obsessed with hatred against the spiritual worship of the Jews, and their refusal to admit his image into the Temple. He stayed their sacrifices, though they were restored for a season, to be finally suspended during the present age. The day for a year system, v. 14, may refer to the desolations of the Turkish or Ottoman empire, of which Antiochus was the representative.

16. God's Deliverance Is Sure.

Daniel 8: 15-27. It does not fall within our province to go into the various fulfillments which have been assigned to the predictions of this chapter—one to the time of the Maccabees, one to our own days, and one to that malign Satanic power which stands up perpetually against the Prince of princes. Let us dwell, rather, on the assertion that whatever sets itself against the kingship of Jesus Christ shall inevitably be broken. The Church of God is menaced today, as never before, by a vast multiplication of malign influences; but the Master's promise holds good that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her. They shall be broken without hand. This is our strong confidence with respect to all our foes, and therefore we may possess our souls in patience. It is interesting that Daniel continued to do the king's

business, notwithstanding the abundance of the revelations given unto him. However much we may be caught up into the heaven of religious meditation and ecstasy, we must never forget or neglect the interests which are committed to our hands, whether of the home, the business, or the state.

17. Intercession for a Beloved People.

Daniel 9: 1-15. What a prayer is this! In many respects it is a model for us all. *It was based on the divine Word.* The fact that God had promised to restore the desolations of Jerusalem after seventy years, did not restrain, but prompted and inspired Daniel's prayers. God's promises are not independent of our faith, but await our appropriation. The blank checks are drawn and signed in our favor, but they must be presented at the bank for payment. *It was very humble.* Fasting, sackcloth, and ashes, were the outward habiliments, but notice the tone. *We have sinned . . . and have rebelled . . . ; unto us [belongeth] confusion of face.* He confessed his sin and the sin of his people. There is such a thing as vicarious confession, in which some holy soul takes to himself the task of bearing the sins of his people, and pouring out the story before God, as though the sins were his own. But we hardly need go to our country or people for sins to confess, for we have plenty of our own, and the nearer we come to God's infinite light and holiness, the more we abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes.

18. Renewed Favor in God's Own Time.

Daniel 9: 16-27. Verses 17-19 have in them a tone of anguish which reminds us of our Lord's words as to the violence which takes the kingdom of heaven by force. God loves to see us in dead earnest. It is not long but *strong* prayers that prevail with him. He sometimes seems to deny us, that he may draw us out in supplication. Notice the response to such prayer. Before it was spoken, it was granted, v. 23. Before Daniel called,

he was answered, and while he was yet speaking, he was heard. Pray on! God is more eager to hear and to bless us than we are to pray. Even now the divine answer is hastening towards thee, swifter than the speed of the morning beams across the vault of space. While we are speaking in prayer, nay, before the beginning of our supplication, the angel is sent out, and he is made to fly very swiftly. Six purposes were to be effected within 490 years from a specified date. Some refer these to final Jewish restoration, but for this the last week of the seventy has to be separated from the rest and postponed till "the end of the age." It is more natural to understand the passage as describing here Christ's finished work, and thus we avoid impairing the definiteness of the prophecy by indefinitely prolonging it. "The prince that shall come" seems to refer to the Roman emperor, Vespasian, whose people destroyed Jerusalem. But many think that v. 27 refers to a future compact between Antichrist and the Jews, previous to their conversion.

19. The Vision by the River.

Daniel 10. This chapter gives a glimpse into the great conflict which is always in progress between heaven and hell. For three weeks the radiant Being who came to Daniel as he prayed and fasted by the great river, was withstood by the mighty fallen spirit, who was concerned with the destinies of the kingdom of Persia; and it was only when he was succored and reinforced that he was able to accomplish the divine errand, v. 13. What a revelation is here—that probably each heathen country is ruled by some wicked spirit in the high places; that the fight is at times almost overpowering even for bright unfallen angels; and that the blessings which are ours are sometimes delayed because of the storms that sweep the ocean through which they come. Perhaps by our prayer we are able to throw an ounce-weight into the scale, and turn the battle. How reassuring the touch of that hand and tender the address

of that voice. Who cannot be strong when strengthened by the right hand of God? Go forth into the fight of another day! God holds thy right hand. Be true and strong; thou canst not fail!

20. The Rise and Fall of Empires.

Daniel 11: 1-14. This chapter foretells the histories of Xerxes, of Alexander the Great, the division of his kingdom on his death, and the long conflicts between the kings of Syria and Egypt. During those years of turmoil and war the eyes of God's faithful servants must often have turned to this page for guidance and comfort. The voice of the prophets was hushed between Malachi 4 and Matthew 1, and therefore the written word would be more than ordinarily precious. It must have comforted them to be assured that God knew the way they had to travel and would supply all needed help. What a weary monotony of strife, war, and misery is the history of world kingdoms! The heathen rage; the peoples are moved. Earth and sky are wrapped in clouds and darkness. We are reminded of the chaos of the primal condition of our earth, when it was without form and void and darkness was on the face of the deep. But as in creation, so in history: in the darkest hours the divine Spirit is brooding in the heart of the night, and will presently re-establish order and beauty.

21. The Despoiler Triumphs for a Time.

Daniel 11: 15-29. What a picture is presented in this paragraph of the tangled web of earthly politics. They have been too much, and for too long, in the hands of those who sought only their own aggrandizement to attain which they have been willing to sacrifice their honor, their families, their daughters, their people. The time has arrived when the people themselves, at first hand, must determine their destinies. These intrigues between the kings of Syria on the north and the kings of Egypt on the south have little interest for us, and are recorded here only as affecting the history of the Chosen

People. This enables us to realize that the events of the present hour are being overruled by divine Providence in the interests of the Church of Christ. This alone abides; all else is of secondary importance and is rapidly passing away. The eternal purpose stands forever sure—that the Father has committed the empire of the world to our Lord, and is about to sum all things up in him, who is the Head.

22. Arrogance Overthrown.

Daniel 11:30-45. The career of Antiochus Epiphanes, in persecuting the people of God and plotting against Jehovah and his sanctuary, is so described as to suggest that it also includes further fulfillments, and especially that last Antichrist, of whom Antiochus was the prefigurement. So accurate is the correspondence between this prophecy and its historical fulfillment that Porphyry, the opponent of Christianity, maintained that this description was written after the event. The abomination of v. 31 refers to the idolatrous image or emblem, which in succession has been erected on Mount Zion under the auspices of Antiochus, of the Romans, the Moslems, and shall be set up yet once more by Antichrist. The last clause of v. 32 was marvelously realized in Judas Macabæus and his brethren; but it represents the perennial source of strength for all who suffer or serve. The anguish of those who fail under trial has often tended to their greater purification, v. 35, and the white robe is the mark of final victory, Rev. 7:9. God will not allow his people to suffer beyond the determined time, v. 36; Matt. 24:22.

23. Resurrection and Judgment.

Daniel 12. Michael was the guardian spirit of the Jewish people. When the time of trouble has reached its climax, whether in national or individual life, help is near.

The hope of resurrection, of the life beyond the darkness of their times, animated the hearts of the Chosen

People. In the same way the Apostle Paul refers to it, 1 Cor. 15:58. The national resurrection of Israel is without doubt included but the resurrection at the last, when that of the just shall precede that of the unjust by the millennium, is clearly the topic of these wonderful words. Daniel's prophecies were to be sealed, because their entire fulfillment was not to take place for many days. Three and a half probably stands for three and a half prophetic years, which, on the year-day system, gives 1260 days or years, and is therefore equivalent to the forty-two months of Rev. 11:2; 13:5. This is the time of the world-power, half the perfect number *seven*. The supremacy of the Gentile kingdoms is 2500 years, of which the latter half has nearly expired, and the Chosen People will not much longer be scattered. It is an interesting fact that, calculated on the lunar measure, these concluding dates have—according to the calculations of the late Dr. Grattan Guinness—just expired. Let us go our way, watch and pray, and at last stand in our lot.

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON DANIEL

OUTLINE.

- (a) Into what two parts is this book naturally divided?
- (b) What visions were granted to Daniel?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) In what respects was the work of Daniel and Jonah alike?
- (d) What empires are symbolized in the visions? What is to be the nature of the final kingdom?

SECTIONS 1—23. CHAPTERS 1—12.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. Why did the four young Jewish captives object to the wine and meat provided by the king? How did God reward their moral courage?
2. Why did King Nebuchadnezzar command that all the wise-men of Babylon be slain?
3. Whence came Daniel's knowledge of the king's dream and the wisdom to interpret it?
4. What interpretation of the dream did Daniel give?
5. What three men refused to worship the golden image?
6. What were the results of their loyalty to God?
7. What was the second dream of King Nebuchadnezzar?
8. What humiliation was to come upon him?
9. What caused Belshazzar to tremble with fear at the feast?
10. What was the meaning of the writing? How did the feasting of the king end?
11. What was Daniel's custom regarding prayer?
12. How was Daniel delivered from the death planned by his enemies?
13. What four empires do the four beasts in Daniel's vision represent?
14. What kingdom shall outlast all others?
15. What was the second vision sent to Daniel?
16. How was the vision explained and by whom?

17. For whom did Daniel offer a prayer of intercession?
What was his request?
18. What kind of prayer prevails with God?
19. How was Daniel enabled to bear the wonderful vision
by the river?
20. What nations' rise and fall does Daniel predict?
21. What countries are meant by the "king of the south
and the king of the north"?
22. In spite of their long series of triumphs, what will
be the end of these ungodly kings and nations?
23. What is the teaching of the chapter concerning the
resurrection and judgment? What should be the
attitude of a Christian in view of the "time of the
end"?

V

THE BOOKS OF HOSEA, JOEL, AND AMOS

OUTLINES

OUTLINE OF HOSEA

GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS APOSTATE PEOPLE

How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I cast thee off, Israel?—Hos. 11: 8.

- I. GOMER, UNFAITHFUL BUT BELOVED, A
SYMBOL OF ISRAEL1—3.
 - 1. *The Prophet's Wife and Family*.1.
 - 2. *Israel To Be Judged and Restored*.2.
 - 3. *The Return of the Prophet's Wife*.3: 1-3.
 - 4. *The Return of Israel*3: 4, 5.
- II. THE DIVINE JUDGMENT AND MERCY ..4—14.
 - 1. *Israel Ripe for Punishment*4.
 - 2. *The Guilt of King and Priests*..5: 1—6: 3.
 - 3. *Israel's Depravity and Stubborn-
ness*6: 4—7: 16.
 - 4. *Reaping the Whirlwind*8: 1—9: 9.
 - 5. *The History of Israel's Apos-
tasy*9: 10—11: 12.
 - 6. *The Triumph of Mercy*12—14.

OUTLINE OF JOEL

JUDAH'S JUDGMENT AND EXALTATION

- I. THE INFLICTION OF JUDGMENT.....1: 1—2: 17.
 - 1. *An Unparalleled Drought and Lo-
cust Plague*1: 1-7.
 - 2. *A Call to Lamentation*1: 8-13.
 - 3. *A Call to Repentance*1: 14-20.
 - 4. *The Sound of Alarm*2: 1-11
 - 5. *The Hope of Forgiveness*.....2: 12-17.

- II. THE MANIFESTATION OF MERCY2: 18-32.
 - 1. *The Destruction of the Destroyer*..2: 18-20.
 - 2. *The Restoration of the Wasted Years*.2: 21-27.
 - 3. *The Outpouring of the Divine Spirit*.2: 28-32.
- III. JUDAH AND THE NATIONS3.
 - 1. *The Nations Summoned to Judgment*3: 1-15.
 - 2. *The Exaltation of Judah*3: 16-21.

OUTLINE OF AMOS

“PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD, O ISRAEL”

- I. GOD’S IMPENDING JUDGMENTS1, 2.
 - 1. *Upon the Surrounding Nations*....1: 1—2: 5.
 - 2. *Upon Israel*2: 6-16.
- II. THE STATEMENT OF ISRAEL’S ACCUSATION3—6.
 - 1. *Sins That Demand Rebuke*3.
 - 2. *Defiance of God’s Judgments*.....4.
 - 3. *Substitution of Religious Forms for Righteousness*5.
 - 4. *Luxurious Self-Indulgence*6.
- III. SYMBOLIC VISIONS OF ISRAEL’S FUTURE..7—9.
 - 1. *Locusts, Fire, the Plumb-Line*....7: 1-9.
(Amos’ Prophesying Provokes Resistance)7: 10-17.
 - 2. *The Basket of Summer Fruit*.....8: 1-3.
(The Accusation Renewed).....8: 4-10.
 - 3. *The Famine of the Word of God*..8: 11-14.
 - 4. *The Smiting of the Temple Pillars*.9: 1-10.
 - 5. *Israel’s Final Restoration*9: 11-15.

INTRODUCTIONS

THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Hosea was probably a native and a subject of the Northern Kingdom, and exercised his ministry during the turbulent reigns of the last six or seven of its kings—a period of about sixty years. The moral and religious condition of Israel was very corrupt. God and his Word were ignored; the kings and princes were murderers and profligates; idolatrous priests maintained their shameful rites in all parts of the country; the great political parties applied for help now from Assyria and then from Egypt.

It has been supposed that the domestic incidents referred to in the first three chapters are parabolic; but to hold this view is to miss the most moving lesson of the suffering which love, whether human or divine, is prepared to undergo, if only the lost can be found and the erring brought back to life and home.

THE BOOK OF JOEL

Of the prophet Joel almost nothing is known. No details of his personal life have come down to us. Even the time when he lived is not known with certainty, though it seems probable that he was one of the first of the prophets. From the frequent references to Judah and Jerusalem it would appear that he was a prophet of the Southern Kingdom.

The general subject of his prophecy is divine judgment, or the Day of Jehovah. There is first a judgment

upon the Chosen People, inflicted through locusts. *This is removed through fasting and intercession. A terrible day of final judgment embracing all nations is then described. The faithful will be rewarded while evil-doers will be punished. The fulfilment of one of Joel's predictions by the scenes of the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:17-21, has given his book a prominent place in Christian thought.*

THE BOOK OF AMOS

Amos was not a prophet or a prophet's son, but a shepherd and husbandman, 7:14. He was conscious of an irresistible commission, 3:8; 7:15. To this he bore witness when Amaziah, the high priest of idolatry, charged him with conspiracy. God is sovereign and selects as his messengers whom he will. Tekoa, still known by that name, was situated on a noble elevation, six miles south of Bethlehem. From this Judacan village Amos was sent on a prophetic mission into the land of Israel. Under the rule of Jeroboam II the nation had reached the high tide of power and prosperity, but corruption and oppression prevailed.

The style of this book is simple, picturesque, and striking. Its illustrations are borrowed from rural employments and breathe the fresh atmosphere of the country. The allusions to history, such as found in 9:7, as well as the power of consecutive thought here shown, prove that, despite the responsible duties of shepherd, Amos found time for mental as well as spiritual culture.

THE BOOK OF HOSEA

1. God Gathers the Outcast.

Hosea 1. The story of Hosea is a pathetic one. He felt impressed that it was his duty to take as wife one whose earlier life had been unchaste. From this marriage resulted three children, the names of whom are terribly significant. They are as follows:—*God will scatter; Not an object of favor; and Once my people, but not so now.* Here is the history of many a soul. In spite of all God's tender love, we may wander from him into the path of sin.

The chapter closes with brighter prognostications. In part, these latter verses were fulfilled by the return from Babylon, and they will be fulfilled in literal fulness some day—probably sooner than we have been wont to suppose. It is good to lay the emphasis on *In the place . . . there.* How often we are taken back to the very circumstances in which we appear to have failed most conspicuously, in order that *there* we may receive the crowning blessing of our life, v. 10. Leave God to vindicate you. He will bring you from the land of the enemy, and extort this confession from the mouth of your critics and foes, v. 10.

2. The Bitter Sin of Wandering from God.

Hosea 2:1-13. Hosea is represented as having exhausted his expostulations upon his faithless wife. He has tried every arrow in love's quiver, but in vain; so now he sends his children, worse than motherless, to plead with their mother, before she brings upon them all irretrievable retribution.

Almost insensibly our mind passes from the pleadings of the human love to the divine Bridegroom. Often he has to erect thornhedges about *us*—not that he takes pleasure in thwarting us, but that we may be diverted

from ruin. There was no better method of turning Israel from her idols than by withholding that material prosperity which she thought they gave. Has not this been our experience also? Our mirth has ceased and our prosperity has vanished. We have sat amid the wrecks of a happy past. It is not that God has ceased to care for us, but that he longs to wean us back to himself. Have we reached the point of saying, "It was better with me then than now"? Then let us be of good cheer! The dawn is already on the hills, and God's coming to us, in restoring grace, is like the breaking glory of the morning!

3. "A Door of Hope."

Hosea 2:14—3:5. The valley of Achor was a long wild pass up through the hills. The prophet says that a door of hope would open there, like the Mont Cenis tunnel which leads from the precipices and torrents on the northern slopes of the Alps to the sunny plains of Italy. That door opens hard by the heap of stones beneath which that troubler of Israel, Achan, was laid. We must put away our Achans before we can see doors of hope swing wide before us.

The prophet was bidden to make one further overture to his truant wife. She had been faithless, but the old love burnt in her husband's soul, and he was prepared to buy her back to himself at half the price of a female slave, *Exod. 21:32*. His only stipulation was that she should abide with him for many days. This was to be a time of testing, with the assurance that, if she were penitent and faithful, she would be perfectly restored.

What a wonderful verse is 3! We are purchased to God by the death of his Son. He only asks us to be for himself and he promises to be for us. "The best of all," cried the dying Wesley, "is that God is for us!" Shall we not close with the offer and give ourselves to him?

4. "Like People, Like Priest."

Hosea 4:1-10. This chapter contains a terrible indictment against the whole kingdom. There was neither

truth nor mercy in the land, but swearing, lying, and adultery. Apart from the restraints of religion, such would be the condition of human society today. Even atheists have been known to remove from mining-camps, where there was no semblance of religion, to places within the sound of the church-bell. Notice in v. 3 how man's sin seems to affect even the animals. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth . . . waiting for our adoption" as the recognized sons of God, Rom. 8: 22, 23.

Rightly enough, the prophet remonstrates with the priests. They were drunken and sensual; they rejected the knowledge and rule of God; they promoted outward ritual in order to fatten on the offerings of the people; and as it was with them, so it became with the deluded worshipers. What a solemn lesson is contained in the proverb which originated in this passage, *Like people, like priest!* It is not what we teach, but what we are, that really affects men. The colorless rays of the sun, lying outside the prismatic band of color, give health.

5. "Joined to Idols."

Hosea 4: 11-19. The prophet does not mince his words in describing the morals of his time. We are reminded of Bunyan's words: "My original and inward pollution was my plague. It was always putting itself forth in me, and I was more loathsome in my own eyes than a toad, and I thought I was in God's eyes also. Corruption bubbled up in my heart as naturally as water in a fountain, and I thought that every one had a better heart than I. Of course in Christ "we have redemption through his blood," and that means more than forgiveness; it implies the deliverance of the soul from the love and power of evil. But if the soul of man refuses this, obstinately and persistently, a time arrives when God gives him up to reap as he has sown.

The greatest gift we can make to our generation is that of unblemished character. Sir Leslie Stephen, the brilliant agnostic, in his mature life, went back to the

grave of an undergraduate, who had been his pupil and had died in early life without having distinguished himself in his studies or athletics, but had lived the Christian life with transparent simplicity and loveliness.

6. God's Rebuke of Apostasy.

Hosea 5. The prophet continues his grave indictment of his people. The court and the priesthood were chiefly responsible for the awful degeneracy that was eating out the national heart. The seductions to idolatry that abounded everywhere resembled the snares and nets set by hunters on the wooded heights of Gilead and Tabor.

Suddenly, within a month, v. 7, an alarm sounds from hill to hill. The foreign invader has entered the country and is slowly marching southward. Even Benjamin is threatened. Ephraim must suffer because of the institutions of Omri and Ahab, v. 11; and Judah, because her princes were grasping and fraudulent. Though message after message was sent to procure the help of Jareb—a symbolical name for Assyria, "the warlike," he would not be able to avert the approaching dissolution of the Jewish state. You cannot stop the dry-rot by grand alliances. Nothing can save a nation in whose heart the worst forms of corruption are being nourished, except a wholesale return to God and a seeking of his face. It is certain that if this lesson were profoundly learned and then practised, the horrors of a world in arms would come to a speedy and a blessed end.

7. "Let Us Return unto the Lord."

Hosea 6. How full Scripture is of tender invitations: *Come, and let us return!* This opening verse is closely connected with 5:15. The hand that smote was the Father's who waited to welcome the prodigal nation with healing and up-binding. When the sun seems to dip below the horizon, we begin to travel toward its rising again. Then we follow on, to behold the glorious dawn of the next day, which is prepared for us. Presently we catch the first glimpse, and soon come into its full

splendor. The sun does not move toward us, but we toward it. So when the soul turns toward God, if only it is willing to do his will, it has begun to follow on toward the light of his countenance, which presently will be revealed in its full radiance. God's favor is also compared to the fertilizing rain, for its certainty and refreshment, Gen. 8:22.

While God's love is constant, our religious life is fickle and changeful. Emotion is evanescent as the morning clouds, which in Palestine vanish by nine or ten o'clock. Our Lord quoted v. 6 in Matthew 9:13; 12:7. The pomp of outward ritual, however ornate, counts less with God than one contrite sigh or tear.

8. Iniquity Uncovered.

Hosea 7. The last clause of the previous chapter belongs to this. God desired to turn aside the captivity of his people and to heal Israel, but his pleading was unavailing because of their inveterate sin. This evil-doing witnessed against them, v. 2. Their passions did not need incitement, just as an oven retains its heat without the baker's continued attention. The royal birthday was celebrated with drunken orgies, and the national religion had become a confused mixture of Gentile superstition and the old Hebrew faith. In this Israel resembled a cake not turned—crisp on one side, sour and uneatable on the other, v. 8.

What a searching suggestion comes in v. 9! Can it be that strangers have been stealing away *our* strength, without our realizing that deterioration is creeping steadily through our religious life? Silently the frosty air steals the warmth from boiling water; silently the fungus pitches its tent in the autumn woods; silently old age fastens on the stalwart frame. Thus also our spiritual strength declines, unless we watch and pray; and when it ebbs away, we become foolish as the dove which flies straight into the snare, and useless as the deceitful bow which turns aside in the archer's hand, vs. 11 and 16.

9. Reaping the Whirlwind.

Hosea 8. A conqueror was at hand who should subdue and punish the whole nation for taking its own course, irrespective of God, vs. 4-8; for seeking foreign alliances which could bring only oppression in their train, vs. 9, 10; and for multiplying altars and fortresses which were destined to be destroyed, vs. 11 and 14. The circumstances referred to in this chapter seem to point to the reigns of Menahem and Uzziah, 2 Kings 15:19; 2 Chron. 26:6-15.

The 5th verse is very striking. Israel had renounced Jehovah for the likeness of a calf, and now in the misfortunes which had overtaken them, their calf had cast them off. What is it that you are putting in the place of God? Power, wealth, the help of influential friends? Sooner or later it will fail you. How different is the One who perpetually encourages us, saying, "I will not fail nor forsake thee," and who promises to carry us to hoar hairs. The persistence with which Israel turned to other lovers left God no option but to put them back into a furnace such as Egypt had been, which would finally burn out their apostasy. Only when we walk before God with a perfect heart are we strong and happy. Once entangle yourself with expedients and alliances, and you lay yourself open to many sorrows.

10. "The Days of Recompense Are Come."

Hosea 9:1-9. The subject of this chapter is the bitterness of the captivity which was awaiting Israel as the result of their unfaithfulness. Their exile would put an effectual end to their idolatrous and sensual feasts. Every pleasure would be removed and every taste would be offended. The contrasts here are very significant. If men choose unclean things when they might have clean, a situation will be created in which only unclean things shall be attainable, v. 3. If they withhold God's offerings when they have plenty, they will presently be reduced to such straits as not to have wherewith to sacrifice or even to sustain life, vs. 4, 5. If we go down to

Egypt for help, in Egypt we shall die, vs. 6, 7. In other words, every sin carries within itself the seed of its own avenging. If allowed to work itself out, its harvest is unutterable and irretrievable.

What a privilege Ephraim had within his grasp, as a watchman with God, v. 8! It is to this privilege, also, that our Saviour calls all of us. He says to us, as he said to his disciples, *Tarry ye here and watch with me*. But too often we refuse to heed the gracious challenge, and allow ourselves to be seduced by the tempter, or by the sloth and corruption of our own hearts, vs. 8, 9.

11. "Wanderers among the Nations."

Hosea 9: 10-17. At the Exodus the love and thanks of Israel were as delightful to God as grapes in the desert or as the first ripe figs. But they gave themselves up to the idols of the heathen, and soon became as abominable as the impure gods which they chose.

The prophet does not hesitate to speak plainly of the effects of the awful license of that age. He says that a nation which sins as Israel had sinned must, in the very nature of things, cease to exist. The birth-rate declines and the family-life is stricken at its roots. So long as the home is revered, and there is a pure and holy love between man and woman, so long, and only so long, is the nation safe. All the battalions that tyrant ever mustered, break on that rock of chrysolite in vain. But sin is like dry-rot, which eats out the vitality and virility of a people. It is an awful verdict when God says, *They shall bear no fruit*, v. 16. We all know the fate of the unfruitful bough. It is only as we yield fruit that we are worth sparing. Will the nations of today learn this lesson? And may we not all question whether the lack of spiritual children does not betoken some degeneracy of our secret life?

12. "Break Up Your Fallow Ground."

Hosea 10. Israel brought forth fruit, but not such as God could delight in. It was corrupt and evil. How

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great a disappointment to the Great Cultivator! The land was covered with obelisks and altars, the symbols of idolatry, and the Canaanites themselves had not been more shameless in sin. But notice the terrible judgments that must befall. There would be revolution, for when men say, *We fear not the Lord*, they will go on to say, *We fear not the king*. *Beth-aven*, the "house of vanity," would replace *Beth-el*, the "house of God." The golden calves would be carried off by the conqueror. The king would perish as foam upon the water. The yoke of conquest would be placed on Ephraim's fair neck. The fortresses of Israel would be carried by assault, with all the accompaniments of savage warfare. Is it not "an evil thing and bitter" to forsake the Lord!

Is it not time that we should look into *our* hearts and lives, break up the fallow ground, now covered with thorns and thistles, and begin to sow in righteousness? Let us ask God to drive the plowshares of deep soul-searching and conviction across the hard and sterile acres of our hearts, and sow them with his good seed.

13. "Bands of Love."

Hosea 11:1-11. This is a very tender chapter, full of moving appeals. God looks back on the happy, blessed past, as a fond parent on the innocent childhood of a son who is now causing endless pain and grief. He recapitulates the call from Egypt, and relates how, in obedience to his appeal, Israel came out of the idolatries of that country. He describes Israel as a tiny child beginning to walk, and says, *I taught him to go*. He compares the Israel of those days to horses or oxen, relieved of the yoke, before whom food is set. Let us remember that God is also willing to teach *us* to go, and to carry us when we are weary.

The blessed childhood of Israel had become like an overcast morning. They were bent on backsliding. But God's love is not easily repelled. What more pathetic words were ever uttered by broken-hearted parents than vs. 8 and 9! That is the motive of our plea still. If

we were dealing with man, we might despair. But we are dealing with One who forgives us according to the riches of his grace. If a back-slider should read these touching appeals, let him be encouraged to retrace his steps one by one, sure that the Father waits to welcome him where the by-path has broken off from the main road.

14. Turn to God, Not to Selfish Gain.

Hosea 11: 12—12: 14. Though Judah still ruled with God, 11: 12, yet there was grave fault in him, and, like Ephraim, which had been engaging the prophet's thought, he also must come under the rod. But throughout this paragraph there lingers the sweet music of the previous chapter, and especially the reminiscence of Israel's early days, when he had power with the Angel and prevailed. The angel-haunted ideals and resolves of Beth-el could not be forgotten. Tears and weakness are the best arguments with God. He yields to us when we are weak; he yields to our despair. The soul that has been shut up to God and then casts itself at his feet can have what it will. Only beware lest after such an interview with the Angel, you deteriorate into a deceitful trafficker, and allow your God-given power to be reduced to making gain.

Notwithstanding all, God was still willing to call his people to the Feast of Tabernacles, the gladdest of all the feasts in the Hebrew year. But even divine love was thwarted by their inveterate sinning. How wonderfully these ancient prophets conceived of the love of God! The spirit of revelation led them to make declarations that the Cross has more than realized!

15. To Oppose God Is Destruction.

Hosea 13: 1-14. Again, a very tender chapter. The lips that speak with trembling betray the heart that God can exalt. But when we turn to Baal, the emblem of self-confidence, we pass as the morning cloud the dew, the chaff, and the smoke.

In v. 4 we again get the sweet strain of early memory.

God had not changed and was waiting to save. They had refused his help and had destroyed themselves, and he who would have done his best for them had been constrained to act as though he were a lion, a leopard, or a bear. In the wilderness we are thankful enough for his help, but when we reach the land of the vine and olive, we follow the devices and desires of our own hearts.

What a magnificent outburst is that which declares the divine intention to ransom even from death and the grave! We all know the New Testament setting of these words. Our Saviour by his death destroyed him that had the power of death. He is death's plague and the grave's destruction. The sting of death is sin, but Jesus has borne sin away. The strength of sin is a violated law, but he has fulfilled the law. He is more than conqueror, and the soul that is one with him shall share his triumph.

16. "I Will Heal Their Backsliding."

Hosea 13:15—14:9. The prophet here ransacks the world of nature for phrases sufficiently expressive of his transports of joy. The whole world seems laid under contribution to set forth the love of God. The gentle dew, the rich raiment of the lily, the far-reaching spurs and roots of the Lebanon range, the spreading branches of the olive, the fragrant breath of the wind which is laden with the perfume of the land, the golden corn ripe for the sickle, the scent of the vines—these are the images with which the inspired imagination of the prophet teems.

But how deeply the chapter appeals to *us*! The very words that returning prodigals should adopt are set down. And as we return, we hear the divine voice assuring us that our backslidings shall be healed, that there is no anger and only love, and that God himself shall be the sap of our fruit-bearing life. Our Father wants it to be clearly understood that these promises do not belong to Israel only but to all who will accept them.

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON HOSEA

OUTLINE.

- (a) What is the key verse of this book?
- (b) Into what two parts is the book divided?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) When and where did Hosea probably live?
- (d) What was the condition of the Northern Kingdom at the time of Hosea's prophecy?

SECTIONS 1—16. CHAPTERS 1—14.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. What is the promise made to outcast Israel?
2. How alone could Israel be made to realize the bitter sin of wandering from God?
3. What man was buried in the valley of Achor? Why had he been put to death?
4. Which of the Commandments are the priests, as well as the people, charged with breaking?
5. What was Israel's greatest sin, the root from which all other transgressions spring?
6. How was Israel to be punished for her apostasy?
7. What purpose other than punishment was served by the afflictions of Israel?
8. How was Israel like a cake not turned?
9. How was Israel responsible for the judgments sent? What did the people choose to worship rather than Jehovah?
10. How does the prophet describe the "days of recompense" for Israel's unfaithfulness?
11. What was the penalty pronounced on the race of Israel because they did not hearken unto God? What is the evidence of history as to its enforcement?
12. What should Israel have done to avert the threatened doom?
13. What is God's will for the sinner?

14. How does the prophet refer to Jacob's experience at Beth-el?
15. What must happen to those who oppose and reject God? Who will be to blame for our destruction?
16. What wonderful promise of forgiveness is made to those who seek God? With what song of praise does the prophecy close?

THE BOOK OF JOEL

1. A Summons to Penitence.

Joel 1—2:11. We know nothing of Joel beyond this book. He was content to be God's mouthpiece and remain unknown. His message was one of unparalleled woe. The memory of God's loving kindness ought to have kept his people faithful and loyal, but since grace and love had failed to affect them awful judgments were announced. A small insect, the locust, was to prostrate man's boasted power. The four kinds of locusts here described and which doubtless devastated the country, were also symbols of the four world-empires, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome, which were to lay waste the Holy Land. Such judgments call for acts of repentance, such as fasting, humiliation, and intercession. There are days in national experience when it becomes us to gird ourselves and lament. The ministers and elders of the Church should lead the way. Where there has been infidelity to the great Lover of souls, when the visible Church or the individual member has turned from Christ to the wanton world, then joy withers away, v. 12, spiritual worship ceases, v. 9, and there can be neither peace nor safety until there has been repentance and return.

2. The Averting of Judgment.

Joel 2:12-27. To rend the *garment* is easy, but a broken and contrite *heart* can be imparted only by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The love of God should bring us to repentance. He takes no pleasure in our miseries and if men repent and turn from their sin they find an immediate and loving welcome to the Father's heart and home. Joel had called for the trumpet to announce war; he now directs the trumpet blast to summon the people, from the highest to the lowest, to plead for help. Prayer and true repentance and faith bring an immediate an-

swer. As the husband yearns over his erring but repentant wife, and is indignant with those who have maltreated her, so will Jehovah remove from us, when we turn to him, those who have cruelly oppressed us.

The great things Jehovah did against Egypt and Babylon are an earnest of what he will do again. The earth, v. 21; the lower animals, v. 22; and, above all, the children of Zion, literal and spiritual, v. 23, have good reason to rejoice in what awaits them. God promises not only to forgive sin, but to make us happy and well provided as if the locust and cankerworm had never settled upon our lives.

3. "The Valley of Decision."

Joel 2:28—3:21. Having stated the outward blessings that would follow repentance, Joel unveils the extraordinary spiritual blessings that were in store. The outpouring of the Spirit, described in Acts 2:16, 17, does not exhaust these glorious words. This blessing is for *all* whom the Lord our God shall call to himself, and as one to whom his call has come, you have a perfect right to claim your share in Pentecost. The promise is to all that are "afar off" in space and time. The very slaves, the most degraded and despised of men, become free when they yield themselves to Jesus and have an equal right to the same Spirit.

The third chapter refers to the last desperate effort made by the powers of the world against Christ and his people. This will be the closing scene of man's apostasy. But the Lord will vindicate and deliver his oppressed from the hand of their oppressors; and the same judgment will bring them blessing. Having cleansed his people from their stains, Messiah will tabernacle among them, Rev. 21:3.

(For Review Questions see next page.)



THE FATE OF EGYPT. Joel 3:19.
From Painting by GUSTAV WERTHEIMER. Modern Austrian Artist.



REVIEW QUESTIONS ON JOEL

OUTLINE.

- (a) What is the theme of this book?
- (b) Into what three parts is the book divided?
- (c) In what three ways is God's mercy manifested?
- (d) What will be Judah's place among the nations?

INTRODUCTION.

- (a) What is known of the prophet Joel?
- (b) What is the general subject of his prophecy?
- (c) What important reference to this prophecy is found in the New Testament?

SECTIONS 1—3. CHAPTERS 1—3.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. What did the prophet see symbolized by the plague of locusts?
2. What is God's attitude towards those who turn in penitence unto him?
3. What shall be the fate of those who fight against God and oppress his people?

THE BOOK OF AMOS

1. Outside Nations Shall Suffer Judgment.

Amos 1:1-10. Amos opens his prophecies with predictions against neighboring peoples, that Israel may be led to appreciate her guilt and to bear the approach of God's righteous judgment, Luke 12:47. The formula of *three transgressions and for four*, v. 3, etc., means several or many. Compare Job 5:19.

The order followed is Syria, v. 3; Philistia, v. 6; Tyre, v. 9; Edom, v. 11; Ammon, v. 13; Moab, 2:1. Each of these neighboring kingdoms was successively overwhelmed by the invasion of the great countries that lay in the valley of the Euphrates. Tiglath-pileser began and ultimately Nebuchadnezzar finished the work of desolation. But in turn the conquerors, becoming enervated by uninterrupted success and prosperity, were also swept away. We may be sure that there is One who judges in the earth and that, although might may assert its claims to be right, it is but for a moment. The constitution of the universe is in harmony with Bethlehem, Nazareth, Calvary: and only a Christian civilization can be permanent.

2. Judah Shall Be Judged Also.

Amos 1:11—2:5. *Edom* was Esau; that is, the people were closely akin to Israel; perhaps for that very reason the hatred on either side became more and more inveterate from the days of the Exodus to the siege and fall of Jerusalem, Ps. 137:7, 8. *Temán* and *Bozrah* were principal cities, the first being named after Esau's grandson, Gen. 36:11. Isaiah, in after years, saw the warrior Angel of Jehovah coming up from Edom to the foothills of Palestine, his garments stained with the blood of the foe whom he had overthrown, 63:1. Thus

Jesus Christ has overcome our foes, and now stands sentry between us and them.

Rabbah was the capital city of Ammon. The strife between the citizens and the Chosen People smouldered from the days of Saul, flaming out from time to time in terrible intensity. *Moab*—the terrible act referred to here was probably associated with 2 Kings 3:27. Alas that, in the divine vengeance, Judah should be associated with these heathen peoples! The indictment is not for sins against man, but for those committed against God. We are judged by the greater light and the higher standards that we possess. The fire here threatened was the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar and his Chaldeans, who have their modern counterparts. Man is often used by the Almighty for the chastening and purifying of his fellows.

3. Neither Shall Israel Escape.

Amos 2:6-16. First the prophet enumerates Israel's sins. They were unjust to the poor, carrying their extortions to such lengths as to goad the poor to desperation. They were unchaste. They held their idolatrous festivities in idol shrines while they unjustly detained and confiscated the pledges of the poor. They perpetrated shamelessly the enormous crimes for which the Amorites were dispossessed by Joshua and their fathers. But notice nothing is said of that great general and his valiant soldiers; our mind is carried beyond all human agency to the Eternal. *I destroyed, etc.* v. 9.

The ripple of the ocean on the beach which you hear and see is due to the action of the sun or moon; so the changes that men attribute to political combinations must ultimately be traced back to the divine will in its permissive or decretive energy. One of the most graphic pictures is in v. 13. We can almost see the heavily laden wagon dragged from the harvest field. The wheels creak and groan; the oxen advance with difficulty; the timbers threaten to succumb. So God bears up the world; and thus did Jesus stoop and sweat great drops of blood under the sins of the whole world.

4. The Lord's Word Must Come True.

Amos 3. The closer our relationship with God, the more searching his scrutiny and chastening. The sins of God's children which may seem of slight consequence are rigorously dealt with by their Heavenly Father, who loves them too well to allow their life to be permanently injured. It is because God loves us that he is so quick in detecting the least symptoms of disease. But we must *agree* with him as to the sinfulness of sin, the need of cleansing, the hopelessness of our old nature, and the world's urgent need both of our sympathy and sacrifice. So only shall we walk with God as Enoch did. The soul that is one with him is on the alert, as is the traveler who hears the lion's roar in the forest. Watch; ye know not the hour!

The nobles of Egypt and Philistia are summoned to view the sins of Samaria and to confirm the justice of her penalty. From all sides the invader would descend on the recreant land. Only a fragment should escape, like the small piece of a lamb rescued from the jaws of the savage beast of prey. The couch of luxury, the bed of sloth, the golden calf of Beth-el—all marked the degeneracy of the Chosen People. May the sorrows through which the world is passing at this hour be the means of cleansing human society from these same evils that our Christian civilization may escape the penalties that overtook Israel!

5. Calamities Are God's Warnings.

Amos 4:1-11. Speaking after the imagery of his vocation, Amos the herdsman compares the rich and powerful of Samaria, who were living in luxury and wantonness, to the kine of Bashan, a bred of cattle notorious for strength and stubbornness. They broke through hedges, threw down fences, trespassed on neighboring pastures, and gored lesser cattle. The judges and magistrates were in cruel collusion with the masters who oppressed the serfs, and were willing to condone breaches of the

law for drink. Sacrifices and tithes were rigorously maintained, but the entire religious system was rotten.

Already heavy judgment had fallen upon the degenerate people. There had been famine, the intermission of the rainy seasons, blasting and mildew, pestilence and murrain—but all in vain. That God was behind these phenomena was obvious from the fact that rain showers had fallen in one place and not in another. There had been a method in God's dealings that indicated a personal agency. The worst cities had suffered the most. But the people had refused to lay it to heart. Note the sorrowful refrain—*yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord*. It may be that some reader of these lines may find herein a clue to the mysterious succession of strokes that have befallen himself and his household.

6. "Prepare To Meet Thy God."

Amos 4: 12—5: 15. Worse judgments than those mentioned in the previous verses were in store but before they are inflicted, the entire nation is summoned to the divine bar. Whether we choose or not, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of God." Prepare, my soul, to meet him! Note the sublimity of that last verse in chapter 4. How great is God, who made the mountains! How mysterious, who made the wind! How sublime, who calls to the dawn! How mighty, to whom mountains and peaks are stepping-stones!

But great and holy though God is, we are invited to seek him. He desires to bless, but he must be sought. Were we more diligent in seeking, as the miner for gold, or the scientific man for nature's secrets, we should be marvelously repaid. "Eye hath not seen," etc. Amos speaks as nature's child. Often as he had tended his flocks, he had watched the Pleiades with their gentle radiance, and Orion, the herald of storm. He had listened to God calling across the waters, and had drawn life from him. "Seek and *live!*" O soul, what a God is thine! Thy springs and storms await his word of com-

mand. He can turn thy darkness into the morning. Be of good cheer!

7. A Dark Day for Hypocrites.

Amos 5: 16-27. Mighty sins had been committed, and mighty judgments were at hand. The oppression of the poor, v. 11; the erection of elegant dwellings from unrighteous exactions, v. 11; the acceptance of bribes to betray the needy, v. 12—all these must be reckoned with. But if the guilty nation would not seek God and establish judgment in the gate, where magistrates sat to dispense justice, the streets would be filled with wailing, and the husbandmen and vine-dressers would be equally affected by the widespread desolation as the dwellers in the cities.

Moreover, bad as Israel's present condition was, it would become infinitely worse, as though a man fleeing from a lion rushed into the arms of a bear, or, taking refuge in a house, was stung by a serpent that lay hid in a cranny of the wall. Of what avail are religious rites, when the heart is alienated from God, v. 21, etc.? Let us heed well the exhortation of vs. 23 and 24. The martyr Stephen quoted vs. 25-27, which accuse the people of carrying about little shrines and pocket-idols, to serve as amulets averting disaster, Acts 7: 43. But they might as well have built a bank of sand to arrest an overflowing flood! The one thing which is going to help us is repentance toward God and faith in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

8. "Woe to Them That Are at Ease in Zion!"

Amos 6. Zion is included with Samaria in this prophecy and the nobles are specially condemned for their drunkenness, gluttony, and insolence. The prophet quotes the example of great neighboring peoples as a warning that the abuse of God's good gifts leads to their withdrawal. Calneh on the Tigris, and Hamath, had fallen before Assyria; Gath, also, had been recently overwhelmed;—how unlikely, therefore, that Is-

rael, eaten through by extravagance and luxury, could endure. National dissolution is not far away, when palaces are filled with riot while the poor rot in neglect. It was thus that Joseph's brethren ate their food at the pit's mouth, while Joseph lay beneath. Many professing Christians are similarly "at ease," indifferent to their brother's woe.

The greatness of approaching judgment is illustrated by a simple incident. A household of eleven is smitten by plague; ten die, one only survives. So great has been the mortality that no nearer relative than an uncle is left to carry out the dead for cremation; and when the matter of a funeral service is broached, the suggestion is instantly met by the remark, "Those old customs cannot be observed amid the stress of such a time; we do not now mention God's name." Funeral rites would pass out of use. God's dealings with his people had been as useless as plowing rocks would be.

9. The Herdsman's Message.

Amos 7. The *king's mowings* were the earliest yield of the grass-lands, which were exacted by him. Our King also has his mowings, when he takes to himself our dearest and best while the dew of youth is still upon them—but he is only claiming his own.

Three disasters threatened the guilty land—locusts, fire, and plague; but the prophet's intercessions warded off the blow. The Bible often tells a similar story of the power of intercession. If only the Church were united and prayed with one voice, she would be able to secure deliverance for the smitten earth. When God is said to repent, we must not attribute to him changeableness of purpose, but he *seems* to repent, because man has changed his attitude. If you walk against the wind, it resists you; but if you turn and walk in the opposite direction, it helps you. The plumbline, v. 7, is used to discover the extent of the mischief, before the order for destruction is issued.

Amaziah, the chief priest of the national idolatry,

found the stalwart witness of the herdsman-prophet extremely inconvenient and wanted to get rid of him. There was great simplicity and dignity in the reply. Like Luther in after years, Amos could "do no other."

10. The Worst Famine of All.

Amos 8. What is more fragile than summer fruit! So beautiful, so refreshing, yet so readily corrupted and diseased. To Amos it was an emblem of the rapidity with which dissolution would overtake his rebellious nation. The end had arrived. The Great Husbandman could do no more. When the harvest has come, separation between good and bad is inevitable. See Isa. 5:4; Matt. 13:30.

The crimes of the ruling class were enormous. Eager to increase their stores, they wearied of time given to religion. They grudged passing a day without opening their salesrooms. They did not scruple to make their measures (*ephah*) small, and to demand a greater weight of money (*shekel*) from their clients. These were crimes that could not be passed over. It is an awful sentence when God says, "I will never forget," v. 7. Invasion would sweep the land like an inundation. Since the people would not heed the God-sent messengers, they would be withdrawn. There would be a famine of the Word of God, and those who had most despised it, because enamoured with the fascinations of youth, would be smitten with an insatiable appetite for it.

11. The Day of Restoration.

Amos 9. The guilty will certainly be punished. If they enter the sacred place of worship, even that will not shelter them, v. 1. Flight and concealment will be in vain. Let them climb ever so high, or burrow ever so deep; let them scale the loftiest hills, or dive into the deepest seas—the consequences of their sins will overtake them, vs. 2, 3. How can sinners hope to escape from him whose chambers are built in the heavens and whose voice governs the tides, v. 6? The great desolations of

the past prove the exactness and severity of his judgments, vs. 7, 8. How remarkably v. 9 has been fulfilled? Notwithstanding their scatterings, the Hebrew people have been preserved as a race.

The final paragraph, vs. 11-15, is very reassuring. It is a burst of noble anticipation, quoted by the Apostle James, Acts 15: 14-17. The promises made to Abraham and David are yet to be fulfilled. The derision of their foes, of whom Edom was the ringleader, will be silenced. Through the parted curtain, we descry the golden age of the future. There is a divine plan working to its conclusion, and Israel shall yet come again to the land given to their fathers.

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON AMOS

OUTLINE.

- (a) What is the warning which sounds through the book of Amos?
- (b) In what visions is Israel's future foretold?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) To what tribe did Amos belong? What was his occupation when summoned to the prophet's office?
- (d) How have the circumstances of his life influenced the style of his book?
- (e) To what nation was the prophet sent?

SECTIONS 1—11. CHAPTERS 1—9.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

- 1. Upon what nations were God's judgments to fall?
- 2. What is indicated as their principal sin and how does it differ from the transgression of Judah?
- 3. What remembrance should have restrained Israel from sin?
- 4. Why did the sin of Israel demand punishment even more than that of the heathen?
- 5. What was God's purpose in sending calamity upon Israel?
- 6. In what verses does Amos describe God as the Creator of the universe?
- 7. Why did the Lord reject the offerings of Israel?
- 8. For what sins are the nobles of Israel specially condemned?
- 9. What answer did Amos make to the accusation of Amaziah?
- 10. What unsatisfied desire would Israel experience, which would be greater than a famine of bread?
- 11. With what promise of restoration does the prophecy of Amos end?

VI

THE BOOKS OF OBADIAH, JONAH, AND
MICAH

OUTLINES

OUTLINE OF OBADIAH

THE DOOM OF EDM

- I. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE NATION.....vs. 1-9.
- II. EDM'S HEARTLESSNESS TOWARD ISRAEL....vs. 10-16.
- III. ISRAEL'S EXALTATION.....vs. 17-21.

OUTLINE OF JONAH

AN UNWILLING PROPHET OF THE MERCIFUL GOD

- I. JONAH'S DISOBEDIENCE1: 1-14.
- II. HIS PUNISHMENT1: 15-17.
- III. HIS PRAYER AND RESCUE2.
- IV. HIS PREACHING IN NINEVEH3: 1-4
- V. THE CITY'S REPENTANCE3: 5-10.
- VI. JONAH'S DISPLEASURE; GOD'S MERCY.....4.

OUTLINE OF MICAH

JUDGMENT SENT FORTH UNTO VICTORY

- I. JUDGMENT1—3.
 - 1. *For Idolatry*1.
 - 2. *For Oppression*2.
 - 3. *False Kings, Prophets, and Priests*..3.

- II. SALVATION4, 5.
 - 1. *God's Reign in Zion*4.
 - 2. *The Ruler from Bethlehem*5.
- III. GOD'S CONTROVERSY WITH HIS PEOPLE6.
 - 1. *A Summons To Contend before the Mountains*6: 1-8.
 - 2. *Condemnation and Judgment*6: 9-16
- IV. JUDGMENT UNTO VICTORY7.
 - 1. *The Appalling National Depravity*....7: 1-13.
 - 2. *The Triumph of Mercy*7: 14-20.

INTRODUCTIONS

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

With regard to the personal life of Obadiah, information is lacking. His prophecy was probably delivered about the time of the fall of Jerusalem, B.C. 586. It is the shortest of the prophetic writings, containing but twenty-one verses. Its theme is the doom of Edom, because that nation mocked Jerusalem when the latter was destroyed. Its predictions have been completely fulfilled.

THE BOOK OF JONAH

Jonah was a native of Gath-hepher in Zebulun. Some think that he was a contemporary and disciple of Elijah, and that he therefore lived about 850 B.C. He is the oldest of the prophets whose writings have come down to us. That the book is historical may be gathered from the references of our Lord in Matthew 12:39-41 and 16:4.

The narrative presents a most striking contrast between the long-suffering mercy of God and the hard indifference of a good man to the fate of a great Gentile city. Probably it indicates the dawn of a better era, when the Chosen People shall enter upon that long education, the results of which Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:19-22; 3:1-8.

THE BOOK OF MICAH

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, but their activities lay apart. Micah lived in the country and was con-

cerned with both Israel and Judah, while Isaiah's career is closely associated with the fortunes of Jerusalem.

The book of Micah shows a clear understanding of the events of the time. He foresaw the invasions of Shalmaneser and Sennacherib, the dispersion of Israel, and the destruction of Jerusalem. Alone among the prophets he foretells the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, 5:2. "His special office, as a herald of coming judgment, causes a predominant severity of tone; but all harshness is softened into exquisite beauty at the close."

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

The Coming Doom of Edom.

Obadiah. A vision was granted to Obadiah of the penalty to be meted out to Edom for his cruelty to his brother Israel. Instead of showing sympathy, the Edomites had feasted their eyes on the misery of their kinsfolk, eagerly watching for their destruction. See Num. 20: 14-21 and Ps. 137: 7. But the very calamities which had befallen Jacob would visit them.

Since we know not how soon we may be called upon to suffer, we should feel compassion for rather than exultation in, the sufferings of others. Malice harbored in any form contains the seed of future suffering. The great day of God is at hand, v. 15, which shall bring retribution to *all* who have set themselves against the kingdom of God. When our Lord returns he will bring redemption to his saints, and his people shall possess their possessions. This suggests the solemn inquiry whether as the heirs of God, we have yet entered upon our inheritance. O happy day, when the kingdom shall be the Lord's and we shall reign with him!

(Owing to the brevity of this book, review questions are omitted.)

THE BOOK OF JONAH

1. Fleeing from God and Duty.

Jonah 1:1-16. Jonah is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25. He was clearly very patriotic, and did not despair of his country in its darkest days. This commission to Nineveh was therefore not to his taste, because he had no desire to see the great heathen city brought to her knees. Another century would have to pass before Isaiah and Micah would proclaim that the heathen world would turn to God, Mic. 4:1; Isa. 2:2.

Rather than go upon this errand of mercy, Jonah hurried down to the one seaport, that he might escape his duty. Sin is always a descent; we always have to pay heavily in tolls and fares when we take our own way instead of God's, and we must never reckon that opportunity implies permission.

Weary with excitement and travel, the prophet is oblivious to the weighing of the anchor. The disasters that block the way of disobedience are harder than our difficulties in performing God's bidding. Note the divine agency in our lives: *the word of the Lord came; the Lord hurled forth a great wind; the Lord prepared a great fish.* There were, in these heathen sailors, beautiful traits which ought to have abashed the prophet. Their prayer to their idols and their endeavor to save this stranger Jew are as instructive as remarkable.

2. A Prayer from the Depths.

Jonah 1:17—2:10. The great fish was probably a shark. He who sent the storm prepared the fish. Life is full of contrivances on the part of the great Lover of men. To plunge beneath the wave is to fall into his arms. More than once the body of a man has been found in the belly of a shark in the Mediterranean. Even those who hold that this story is an elaborate parable must ad-

mit that it is probably founded on such a fact. Our Lord's endorsement of this book and incident is very emphatic, Matt. 12:39-41.

The psalm which follows is very helpful to those who have brought themselves into the depths by their wrongdoing. God will hear such out of the depths of Sheol. When you think you are cast out of his sight forever, if you will look toward his holy temple, you will find that his love is gradually extricating you from the pit. To trust in your own efforts and expedients is to regard lying vanities and to forsake your own mercy. "Salvation is of the Lord." All nature waits upon his word. The big sharks and the tiny minnows are alike at the behest of God for the help of man. Only "look again" to God, and then be sure to pay your vows when delivered!

3. A Repentant City.

Jonah 3. Peter was not only forgiven, but restored to his office; so also was Jonah again sent to Nineveh. Thank God for our second chances! There was no hesitancy this time. The prophet arose and went. The story of his deliverance seems to have reached Nineveh and to have prepared its people to receive his word, Luke 11:30. We must deliver God's messages and preach only as he bids us. He will tell us what to say.

Nineveh is said to have been sixty miles in circuit, the distance of a three days' journey. It was full of violence and cruelty. But the sight of that strange figure, clad in a rude sheep-skin mantle, smote its conscience. The alarm spread from the streets to the palace. Even the great king felt it within his sculptured chambers. It stirred him to action, so that king and court, peers and people, and even the brute creation, became united in one act of common humiliation. The repentance was city-wide in its scope, v. 5; was practical, v. 8; and directed toward God, v. 9. What a contrast to Israel! There, prophet after prophet was exposed to refusal and even to cruel usage. Whatever fear there may have

been upon man's side, there was no hesitation upon God's. He abundantly pardoned! See Isa. 55:7.

4. The Prophet's Narrowness Rebuked.

Jonah 4. This chapter marks an era in the development of the outlook of the Hebrew people. Here, upon its repentance, a heathen city was pardoned. Clearly Jehovah was the God, not of Jews only but of Gentiles also. Jonah, however, had no pleasure in the revelation. He clung to the bitter narrowness of national prejudice fearing that when his own people received tidings of Nineveh's repentance and deliverance, they would be encouraged in their obstinate refusal of God's law.

How often God puts gourds into our lives to refresh us with their exquisite greenery, and to remind us of his thoughtful love! Our fretfulness and petulance are no barriers to his tender mercy. The withering of the gourd extorted bitter reproaches from the prophet who would have beheld the destruction of Nineveh without a tear. He did not realize that to God Nineveh was all, and much more, than the gourd was to him. Notice the extreme beauty of the concluding verse: The permanence of the city contrasted with the frailty of the gourd! The responsibility of God for Nineveh, which he had made to grow! The preciousness to him, not only of the mature, but of babes and cattle!

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON JONAH

OUTLINE.

- (a) What are the five divisions of the book of Jonah?
- (b) What contrast appears in the conclusion?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) Who was Jonah?
- (d) What evidence is there that his book is historical?
- (e) What striking contrast is found in the narrative?

SECTIONS 1—4. CHAPTERS 1—4.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. How did Jonah seek to evade duty?
2. What experience taught the prophet the folly of fleeing from God? What answer was made to Jonah's prayer?
3. What second chance was given the prophet? What was the result of his preaching?
4. How was the prophet's narrow, selfish spirit rebuked?

THE BOOK OF MICAH

1. God's Witness against His Chosen.

Micah 1. Micah was contemporary with Isaiah and Hosea. Jeremiah quotes from him. Compare 3:12 and Jer. 26:18.

In vs. 1-4 the prophet *summons the nations* to behold the just punishment which Jehovah would mete out to his faithless people. Verses 5, 6 portray the desolation of *Samaria*. Destruction would settle on the homes and fields of men, and the prospect of this so affected the prophet that he divested himself of outer garment and sandals, that his disheveled condition might depict the calamities that he announced. Verses 10-16 make clear that Judah also would suffer similar chastisements. Aphrah and Shaphir would be hurried into captivity. So universal would be the calamity that Zaanan would not come to bewail with the neighboring city of Bethel.

The prophets were true patriots and they felt that all good citizens should lament with them, v. 16, in the hope of averting impending judgments. Are we feeling the sins and sorrows of our time, as Jesus felt those of Jerusalem, when he wept over the city?

2. The Harvest of Greed and Injustice.

Micah 2. The former chapter dealt with sins against the *first* table of the law; this deals with those against the *second*. Evil must sooner or later befall those who devise evil against their neighbors, covet their goods, and oppress their persons. So absolute would be the destruction, that estates would no longer descend from father to son, or be measured by lot, v. 5; and the people would become hard and callous to the prophet's voice, v. 6. Yet through it all God's Spirit would yearn over his people, vs. 7-13; his words would still comfort humble souls. But the cruelty of men who despoiled their poor neigh-

bors, not only of their ornaments but of the tunic next their skin, would bring disaster upon the entire nation. The guilty people must prepare to arise and depart, for Canaan could no longer be their home.

But even from captivity God would restore his people, breaking the way through walls of difficulty. Our Breaker is the Lord Jesus who broke the way for us from the prison-house of death. Let us follow him as he passes on his way to victory.

3. The Punishment of Avarice.

Micah 3. The princes who as magistrates should have administered justice to others sat around the caldron, casting in the very flesh and skin of the people whom they were set to rule. Their perversion of justice would lead to their inability to distinguish between evil and good. Sin not only sears the conscience but darkens the understanding, Eph. 4: 18. Their punishment would be like their guilt. As they had refused the cry of the oppressed, so would God refuse theirs. The false prophets had wilfully misled the people. Their one desire was to get food. For those who provided it, they uttered peace; for those who opposed them, war. Therefore they would be left without a vision; God's Spirit would cease to strive. How great the contrast between them and Micah, who spoke with the consciousness of spiritual power! Oh, that every minister and teacher of God's holy gospel were able to utter v. 8! It may be ours through the Holy Spirit.

4. The Promise of Peace.

Micah 4. It is not improbable that Isaiah, 2: 1-4, and Micah quoted an older prophecy, which in its fullness, is yet to be fulfilled. In the millennial age Israel, in her restored beauty, will be the center of a renovated world. That restoration will bring great glory to God and blessing to mankind, Rom. 11: 15. The time center of unity is not to be found in creeds or systems, but in the impulse of a common desire after God and common worship.

When men have found their unity in God they will renounce war; and the home-life will become the preservative of society, v. 4. Verses 6 and 7 foretell the gathering of Israel to their own land. Babylon probably stands not only for the literal nation by which the Jews were carried into captivity, but for all of the Gentile nations that have afflicted the Chosen People. Notice that God's deliverances discover and help us in the midst of our direct affliction.

5. The Deliverer from Bethlehem.

Micah 5. This name for Bethlehem recalls Genesis 48:7. Though insignificant in size she would outshine her compeers, because of Messiah's birth, Matt. 2:6. As man, our Lord comes from David's city; but as Son of God, his goings forth are from eternity. Though the Jewish flock rejected him, he is the Shepherd of men. He is great to the ends of the earth, and has made peace by the blood of his Cross. What though the Assyrian, whether ancient or modern, threaten us, shepherds and princes shall be raised up as delivers, v. 5. The ranks of the democracy hold within themselves unbounded stores of leadership. God's people refresh the world like dew, and are lionlike in strength and courage, v. 8. Horses, chariots, and walled cities, are classed with witchcrafts, etc., because they weaned away the trust of God's people. "Thou shalt no more worship the work of thy hands."

6. "What Doth the Lord Require of Thee?"

Micah 6. In vs. 1-4 the prophet returns from his vision of the future to the actual condition of his people, which was utterly desperate. The mountains, as the most enduring monuments of nature, are summoned as witnesses in the great trial between Jehovah and his people. Like Israel, *we* have been delivered from the house of bondage with infinite love, but how wayward and wilful we have been! Verses 5-8 prove the impotence of a religion which is only external.

Few have known more sublime truth than Baalim, v. 5, but he loved the wages of unrighteousness; and this eclipsed the divine radiance that became overcast and finally overwhelmed. Verses 9-11 reveal the fruitlessness of a life of sin. Sooner or later nature herself becomes unresponsive—sowing, but no harvest; the treading of the press, but no juice. The only path to real satisfaction and peace is in the love and faithful service of God. Why are we so slow to tread it?

7. God's Compassion for an Erring People.

Micah 7. Things had come to an awful pass in the favored city. Oppression, bribery, and bloodshed, were everywhere in the ascendant. Men wrought evil with both hands. Husbands could not trust their wives. At such a time there is no refuge for God's children save in God, vs. 7-13.

When we have learned our lesson we find God appearing for our help. He brings forth to the light and vindicates us. Then those that hated us, and suggested that he had forsaken, will be compelled to admit that he has completely vindicated us from their reproach. Be of good cheer, believer; wait for God. He will bring out thy righteousness as the light and thy judgment as the noonday, vs. 10-12.

Next the prophet pleads with Israel's Shepherd to repeat the marvels of the Exodus. He knows that God will not only pardon iniquities but *subdue* them, trampling them beneath his feet. This anticipates the Ascension, Eph. 1: 20-23. When a stone sinks into ocean depths, it cannot be recovered; and when sin is forgiven God never recalls it either here or hereafter.

(*For Review Questions see next page.*)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON MICAH

OUTLINE.

- (a) What are the sins of Israel for which she is to be judged?
- (b) To what end is God's judgment?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) With what other prophets was Micah contemporary?
- (d) What is the tone of the book of Micah?
- (e) What special reference is made to the birth of Christ?

SECTIONS 1—7. CHAPTERS 1—7.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. Into what sin against God did the people of Israel constantly fall?
2. Of what sins against their fellow-men were they also guilty?
3. What were the greatest faults of the rulers and those in authority? What would be their punishment?
4. When will men renounce war?
5. What honor was to be bestowed on Bethlehem Ephratah?
6. How does the prophet answer the question, "What doth the Lord require of thee?"
7. What is the teaching of Micah regarding the compassionate forgiveness of God?

VII
THE BOOKS OF NAHUM, HABAKKUK,
AND ZEPHANIAH

OUTLINES

OUTLINE OF NAHUM

THE DOOM OF NINEVEH

- I. GOD RESERVES WRATH FOR HIS ADVERSARIES1: 1—2: 2.
 1. *The Resistless Power of God's Judgments*1: 1-8.
 2. *Warning to Assyria; Comfort for Judah*1: 9—2: 2.
- II. THE CAPITAL OF ASSYRIA SHALL PERISH. 2: 3—3: 19.
 1. *The Siege, Capture, and Sack of the City*2: 3-12.
 2. *"Behold, I Am Against Thee"*...2: 13—3: 19.

OUTLINE OF HABAKKUK

"THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH"

- I. THE PROPHET'S EXPOSTULATION1, 2.
 1. *Why Are Iniquity and Injustice Permitted To Prevail?*1: 1-4.
Reply: The Chaldeans Will Execute Judgment1: 5-11.
 2. *How Can Power Be Given to So Wicked a People?*1: 12-17.
Reply: Their Exaltation Is but Temporary2: 1-4.
 3. *Five Woes against the Chaldeans*....2: 5-20.

II. THE PROPHET'S PRAYER3.

1. *God's Mighty Works a Ground of Hope.* 3: 1-15.
2. *A Declaration of Unwavering Faith.* 3: 16-19.

OUTLINE OF ZEPHANIAH

"THE DAY OF THE LORD"

I. A DAY OF JUDGMENT1: 1—3: 8.

1. *Upon the Whole Earth*1: 1-3.
2. *Upon Particular Nations*.....1: 4—3: 8.
 - (1) *Judah and Jerusalem*1: 4-18.
(*Call to Repentance*).....2: 1-3.
 - (2) *Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria*2: 4-15.
 - (3) *Princes, Prophets, and Priests of Jerusalem*3: 1-7.
(*Call to Repentance*)3: 8.

II. A DAY OF HOPE3: 9-20.

1. *All Nations To Be Taught the Worship of God*3: 9, 10.
2. *The Cleansing of Israel*3: 11-13.
3. *God's Gracious Reign*3: 14-20.

INTRODUCTIONS

THE BOOK OF NAHUM

The theme of the prophecy of Nahum is the complete and final destruction of Nineveh. Jonah had already warned the city of its danger, and a temporary respite had been gained by repentance. But the people soon returned to their evil ways, and Nahum was sent to declare the doom of the city, without promise of relief.

Nineveh was one of the greatest cities of ancient times, the capital of the flourishing Assyrian empire. At the time when Nahum delivered his prophecy, Assurbanipal was at the height of his power. His capital was the center of the trade and commerce of the world. Yet it was a "bloody city, all full of lies and robbery," having plundered the neighboring nations, and was ripe for destruction. Within a short time the prophet's words came true; the great city was laid low, scattered ruins still marking the place where it stood.

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

The prophecy of Habakkuk is concerned with the rise of the Chaldeans to power. Habakkuk had seen this mighty people used in inflicting judgment upon Nineveh, and they appeared to be the very instrument of God. But a problem arose when they were seen to be as wicked as the Assyrians whom they had destroyed. How could God use for any purpose a heartless, cruel nation, bent wholly upon

evil? The prophet's answer is that God will make all his dealings clear if we but wait for him. "The just shall live by faith." When the issues appear confused, the righteous can still remain steadfast and loyal to God—that is their life. "Be true; light will dawn."

The last chapter is a poem of great beauty, remarkable for its expression of unwavering faith. Though all gifts fail, the Giver himself abides, and in him the prophet will rejoice.

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah may have been a great-great-grandson of Hezekiah, Zeph. 1:1, R.V. He prophesied during the reign of Josiah, probably before the discovery of the Book of the Law, as the evils which he denounced were then removed by the king.

Zephaniah is the prophet of the Day of the Lord. He does not, like Obadiah, Nahum, or Habakkuk, deal with the downfall of any one nation; he is instead a prophet of universal judgment. His message to the nations is parallel to the words of Jesus: "Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," Luke 13:4, 5.

Zephaniah declares that all nations, even Judah itself, will fall under the divine wrath if they continue to defy the divine law. But his message is more than one of judgment. He shows that God is working for the salvation of mankind and that following judgment there will be revealed new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

THE BOOK OF NAHUM

1. God's Goodness and Righteous Anger.

Nahum 1. The native city of Nahum was Elkosh, near the Lake of Galilee. The name Capernaum means literally "the village of Nahum." He lived about 150 years after Jonah, who also had been especially concerned with the sins and doom of Nineveh. Though as a Jew he must have dreaded Nineveh, which had already carried Samaria into captivity and was now menacing Jerusalem, he accounted its fate a grievous *burden*—"the burden of Nineveh." We must never speak of the doom of the ungodly, save from a broken heart.

Verses 1-8 form magnificent preamble combining the goodness and severity of God. His dealings with mankind are wrapped in mystery, but he is good and the stronghold of his saints. In vs. 9-15 we see how mad Assyria was to enter into conflict with Jehovah. The fate of thorns in fiercely burning flame is the emblem of their doom. Compare v. 14 with Isa. 37:38. When the hour of anguish is past, let us not forget to pay our vows.

2. A Cruel City To Be Overthrown.

Nahum 2. This is a prophetic foreview of the overthrow of Nineveh by the Medo-Babylonians. God had used her for the chastisement of his people; now, in turn, she must be cast away for her sins. The attacking soldiers wore crimson tunics, and the chariot wheels were armed with scythes, that flashed as they revolved. The streets might be filled with chariots mustering for defence, but all must be in vain since the scaling-ladders were already against the walls, and the gates of the rivers would soon be opened. Huzzah was Nineveh's queen, and represents the condition of the city, going into captivity as a slave, with bare face and legs. Note the comparison of Nineveh to a den of lions filled with

bones. Fire and sword completed her ruin. This is the lot of the enemies of God's people. See Isa. 54:16, 17. But if God is true to his threatenings, how much more is he true to his promises!

3. Deserved Doom.

Nahum 3. This terrible chapter pictures the doom of Nineveh. She had used infamous methods in bringing surrounding nations under her power, and now her shame was to be discovered and exposed. It seemed incredible that so great a city should become desolate, but she is reminded of the populous Thebes especially dedicated to Ammon, the Egyptian Jupiter. As this great city had been overwhelmed by Assyria, so would Nineveh be by the Chaldeans. In spite of her Nile and her tributary nations, Thebes fell, and Nineveh would drink of the same cup. Her fall would be as easy as the plucking of ripe figs. The centuries that have passed since the prophet spoke only lend emphasis to his words. The silence of death still reigns over the desolate mounds that mark the site of the cherished capital. In Revelation 19:1-10 the saints and martyrs celebrate the fall of Babylon the Great. Let us see to it that we are heirs of that Kingdom which cannot be shaken, Heb. 12:28.

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON NAHUM

OUTLINE.

- (a) What is the theme of this prophecy?
- (b) To what two nations is it addressed?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) By what prophet had Nineveh been warned at an earlier date?
- (d) What was the standing of Nineveh during Nahum's lifetime?
- (e) What importance has the city now?

SECTIONS 1—3. CHAPTERS 1—3.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. What two attributes of God does the prophet emphasize?
2. Why were the invaders of Nineveh sure to triumph?
Of what were they the instrument?
3. Why would the downfall of Nineveh arouse no pity?

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

1. The Apparent Prosperity of the Wicked.

Habakkuk 1. Habakkuk probably lived toward the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, when the Chaldeans were preparing to invade the land. Jerusalem was filled with wickedness. Crimes of violence and lawlessness had become so numerous that the prophet was appalled at the sight. He could only point to the fate of other nations, which must also befall Judah unless the people repented. Paul quotes v. 5 in Acts 13:41. The Chaldeans are compared to the leopard, the evening wolf, and the east wind. The prophet turns to Jehovah in an agony of expostulation and entreaty. Was he not from everlasting? Was he not Israel's Rock? The prophet's solace is the reflection, "We shall not die." An ancient reading is, "Thou canst not die." We are reminded of Revelation 1:18. O thou undying, unchanging, life-giving Saviour, we cling to thee amid the storms that sweep the world, as limpets to the rock.

2. "The Just Shall Live by Faith."

Habakkuk 2. Having prayed, the prophet expected an answer and looked out for it. When it came, there would be no mistaking it. But until we see eye to eye, we must live by simple faith in God. Note that wonderful clause in v. 4, which is referred to so often afterward. See Rom. 1:17; Gal. 2:16; 3:11. Life in this age, as in that, may be obtained and maintained by faith in the ever-living God. Through long waiting-times the only source of continued life is the faith which draws all from God. From v. 5 onwards, the prophet enumerates Babylon's sins: her pride, love of strong drink, rapacity, and violence. It could not be God's will that the mighty city should flourish on the anguish of the world.

From scenes of anarchy and riot which foretell Chaldaea's doom, we pass into Jehovah's temple, where peaceful silence reigns! Let us live in that secret place! "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him!"

3. The Faith That Is Invincible.

Habakkuk 3. This psalm was intended to be sung by the captives during the Exile, which was near. In vs. 3-15 there is a recital of the great events in the past. First Sinai, then the victories and deliverances of the book of Judges, the passage of the Red Sea and Jordan, the divine vengeance on the oppressors. But the prophet could not contemplate the future of the Chosen People without dismay. He longed to be at rest before those terrible Chaldean hosts burst upon the land. At the close he breaks into a sublime refrain which has been the solace and song of myriads of believers. If all God's gifts failed he would still possess the Giver. He could still triumph in God. Indeed, the divine Saviour and Friend is often more apparent when the fields and the farmsteads are bare.

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON HABAKKUK

OUTLINE.

- (a) What are the two main divisions of the book?
- (b) How does the spirit of the first part differ from that of the second part?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) What nation's rise to power occasioned the prophecy of Habakkuk?
- (d) What question concerning this nation's power vexed the prophet?
- (e) What answer does the prophet find?

SECTIONS 1—3. CHAPTERS 1—3.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. What complaint does the prophet make to the Lord?
2. What answer is given him?
3. In what words does the prophet express the strength of his faith in God?

THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

1. "The Great Day of the Lord."

Zephaniah 1. Zephaniah means *hidden of the Lord*. He lived in Josiah's reign, and co-operated with that king in his efforts to put down idolatry. His prophecy deals with the sins that were rife in Judah and the fearful retribution that would be inflicted through the Chaldeans. *Approaching destruction*, vs. 2-6. The *Chemarim*, R.V., were idolatrous priests dressed in black garments. *Malcam* is *Milcom* or *Moloch*. Notice the successive classes of those who were to suffer in the overthrow. They constitute a series of concentric circles, narrowing down at last to those who had turned back, and to those who had never sought the Lord. *The invaders*, vs. 7-18. The guests whom God invited to the banquet were Nebuchadnezzar and his soldiers! They marched in through the Fish Gate; and, as they advanced, cry after cry arose from the affrighted populace, driven from quarter to quarter. *Maktesh*, v. 11, was probably the Vale of Siloam, where the merchant princes dwelt or pursued their business. None would be able to elude the coming vengeance. Those that affected foreign attire, or leaped across the threshold in superstition, or practiced deceit, would have to pay dearly for their sins. Fulfilled in the overthrow of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and afterward by Titus, these words will always stand for the inevitable national sufferings which follow national crimes.

2. Meekness Saves, Pride Destroys.

Zephaniah 2. The nation, on the whole, had no remorse, no desire for God; but there were a few meek and lowly souls, and the hope was held out to them that they would be hidden from the coming overthrow. God discriminates in his judgments, and sends his angels to conduct Lot out of Sodom. The judgment

of the surrounding nations occupies vs. 4-18. Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria, are mentioned. God never forgets the treatment meted out to his people by their foes, vs. 8-10. The captivity of Israel would be turned again, but there was no hope of recovery for the peoples that had rejoiced in their overthrow. What a picture is given in v. 11 of famished gods! It seemed incredible that great Nineveh should become a wilderness, yet so it has been for centuries. Whenever an individual or nation dwells carelessly, destruction is not far away.

3. Fullness of Salvation.

Zephaniah 3. The sins of Jerusalem, vs. 1-7. Uninfluenced by judgments upon other nations, Jerusalem pursued her course, morally impure, oppressive, refusing instruction, estranged from God. Yet God still dwelt in the city which he had chosen. Morning by morning his Spirit was appealing for repentance and righteousness. Through his faithful ones he was still shedding the light and glory of a holier civilization through the community, but the population at large refused to heed.

The effects of cleansing judgment, vs. 8-20. These closing verses are marked by great tenderness, showing as they do, the results that God's dealings are designed to effect. A pure life; service with one consent; the trust of the afflicted soul in the love of God; the weaning of the heart from all iniquity—what great and lovely results of that long captivity! Let God have his way with you! He will change your sorrow into songs; will cast out your enemies and turn again your captivity; will manifest his infinite love, now in brooding tenderness, and then in outbursting songs. Those who have been filled with sorrow, and have borne the burden of reproach for God, shall be comforted. Even the halt and exiled shall participate, and become *a name and a praise*. The captives would be liberated and the dispersed would be gathered home.

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON ZEPHANIAH

OUTLINE.

- (a) What are the two main divisions of the book?
- (b) Against what nations is judgment pronounced?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) During whose reign did Zephaniah prophesy?
- (d) Of what nature is his prophecy and for whom was it intended?
- (e) What comforting message does Zephaniah bring?

SECTIONS 1—3. CHAPTERS 1—3.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. Of what dreadful day does Zephaniah warn Jerusalem?
What historical events fulfilled the prophecy?
2. What has been the fate of Nineveh? What vice lay at the root of her evil-doing?
3. With what song of rejoicing does the book end?

VIII

THE BOOKS OF HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH,
AND MALACHI

OUTLINES

OUTLINE OF HAGGAI

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“THE LORD’S MESSENGER”

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- II. THE SINS OF THE PRIESTS 1: 6—2: 9.
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INTRODUCTIONS

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

Haggai returned from exile in Babylon, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, in the year 536 B.C., when Cyrus, moved by the striking prophecies about himself, which had probably been brought under his notice by Daniel, granted the Jews their liberty, and provided them with materials for restoring their Temple. This work of rebuilding went on under Cyrus and his successor, in spite of the opposition of the Samaritans; but, finally, these inveterate foes of the returned exiles obtained an edict from Artaxerxes to stay the progress of the rebuilding of the Temple, Ezra 4:7-23. The Jews gave up the work, and began to build splendid mansions for themselves, so that the operations on the Temple site were not recommenced, even when there was opportunity for them. For fourteen years the work was discontinued, until Haggai uttered his burning message. He seems to have been an old man when summoned to the prophet's office, and his term of service lasted for only four months. But when a man speaks in the power of God, you cannot measure the effect by chronology. His brief ministry had immediate effect, for within three weeks the people were once more at work.

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

The prophet Zechariah lived at the same time as Haggai and was interested in the same effort to induce the Jews to carry on the rebuilding of their neglected Temple. The

prophecies are dated a few years later than those of Haggai. In contrast to the direct and simple language of Haggai, Zechariah employs many figures and symbols to enforce his message. He especially wished to give encouragement and help to the leader and governor of the people, Zerubbabel, and the priest Joshua.

In the latter part of the book there are many pictures of the glorious and happy future, which God had in store for his people and of the Deliverer, who was to come to rule over them. There will come a great day "when the Lord shall be King over all the earth."

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

The name Malachi means "my messenger," so that, perhaps we do not know the name of the real author of this book, who hides himself behind his office and his message. Sixty years had passed since the first return of Israel from the land of captivity, under Joshua and Zerubbabel, and during this time the holy seed had become mingled with the people of the land. It was necessary, therefore, for a compelling voice to demand the purging and cleansing of the priesthood and the people.

The moral and religious condition of Israel was at a low ebb. They were the slaves of formalism and self-righteousness; satisfied with themselves, and not hesitating to blaspheme God's name. Therefore instead of the language of promise and encouragement used by Haggai and Zechariah, there was need to substitute the reproofs and warnings of this last of the prophets, between whom and the New Testament four hundred years were destined to intervene.

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

1. Selfish and Shortsighted Thrift.

Haggai 1:1-11. Zerubbabel is the Sheshbazzar of Ezra 1:8. He was of the royal line, and appointed governor by Cyrus. Josedeck was son of Seraiah, high priest when Jerusalem was taken, 2 Kings 25:18-21. The returned exiles had been experiencing a succession of bad seasons. They had sown much, and reaped little; their money ran out of the bag as quickly as they put it in; a drought lay on all the land, and the reason for it was to be found in the neglected Temple. How frequently our disasters and losses in business arise from our failure to remember God's cause. We say that we have not the time, cannot afford the money, and see no necessity for setting apart the Lord's Day or the daily period for meditation and prayer. Did we see things as they really are, we should find that this is false economy, and wastes more than we save. "There is that which withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." The mower does not waste time when he stops to whet his scythe.

2. The True Glory of God's House.

Haggai 1:12—2:9. One earnest man can arouse an entire community. Let a fire glow in our hearts, and it will spread. Assured of God's presence and favor, within three weeks the whole land was awake. Note the co-operation of God's Spirit with the message of his servant, "the Lord stirred up." Let us ever seek and rely on his co-operation! "We are witnesses, so also is the Holy Spirit!" Three prophecies occupy the following chapter. In the first, vs. 1-9, the Jews are encouraged to persevere. Although there was no comparison between the glory of Solomon's Temple and the splendor of this,

they must not be discouraged. Though they might deplore the absence of the sacred fire of the Shekinah, of the Ark with its cherubim, of the Urim and Thummim, and of the spirit of prophecy, yet the Messiah's presence, which would be associated with the second Temple would more than compensate for their deficiency, since He was the antitype of them all. If we lack many of the advantages and attractions in which others excel, let us be more than satisfied to possess Christ. And be it always remembered that Christian worship seeks to realize the presence of him who said: "I am in the midst." Without that a cathedral is an empty void; with that, a barn will be heaven. For vs. 6 and 7 see Heb. 12: 26-28. This *little while* in God's arithmetic lasted for 517 years.

3. God's Judgment upon the Nations.

Haggai 2: 10-23. Two months after the foregoing prophecy, the prophet again remonstrated with the people for still neglecting the Temple, though they appear to have maintained religious rites. As the holy flesh did not sanctify what it touched, so religious observance did not compensate for neglecting the Temple; such neglect would make their service unclean, v. 14. The earnest toils of the people had met with persistent unsucess because God was against them, but from the moment of their repentance he would bless them, vs. 18, 19. Amid all the upheavals described in 2: 7 the Jews would be preserved, and their safety guaranteed. Disturbances preceded the Saviour's first advent, as they will the second; but amid the shaking and overthrowing that are ushering in the new era, let us not fear. All that cannot be shaken will remain; and as God remembered Noah amid the tossings of the deluge, he will care for us, not because of our deserts, but because of his grace. We did not choose him, but he us.

(For Review Questions see next page.)



HAGGAI SUMMONS THE PEOPLE. Hag. 1: 3-8.

From Painting by JOHN S. SARGENT.
Modern American Artist.

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON HAGGAI

OUTLINE.

- (a) What is the theme of the book?
- (b) With what promise does the book close?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) What is known of the prophet Haggai?
- (d) For what did he reprove the people?
- (e) What effect had his message?

SECTIONS 1—3. CHAPTERS 1—2.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. What work had been neglected by the Jews? How was God's displeasure manifested?
2. What was to make the "latter house" more glorious than the one built by Solomon?
3. What special message did Haggai declare to Zerubabel?

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

1. A Vision of Pardon and Restoration.

Zechariah 1:1-17. Zechariah does not slur over the sins of the past, but lays stress on the divine forgiveness. His only fear is lest God should call in vain, and the people refuse as their fathers did. Notice the repetition of God's title, Lord of Hosts, five time in the first six verses. The enemy's armies were vast, but the protecting hosts, vaster. A glimpse of these hosts is given in the following vision. A green valley, filled with myrtles, the emblem of humility, where the prophet may have been wont to meditate, seemed alive with mysterious figures, who had been patrolling the earth, and announced that it was peace, for these were the days of Cyrus' illustrious reign. Notice the frequent reference to his celestial friend, vs. 9, 14, 19; 4:1, 4, 5; 5:5, 10; 6:4. The future was bright with promise, 1:16, 17.

2. The Redemption of Jerusalem.

Zechariah 1:18—2:13. The work of Temple-building had ceased for fifteen years and the new resolve to arise and build might meet with a similar fate. But the four horns met with four carpenters. For Babylon the carpenter was Cyrus; for Persia, Alexander the Great; for Greece, the Roman; for Rome, the Gaul. No weapon that is formed to thwart God's purposes can prosper. The young man with the measuring line embodied the new spirit animating the returned exiles. But God was intending to give more prosperity and increase than could be contained in walls.

3. Purified for God's Service.

Zechariah 3:1-10. The regulation for the maintenance of the priesthood had fallen into disuse, and they had

neither robes, vessels, nor proper provision of offerings. Probably also the spiritual life of the priests was at a very low ebb, Mal. 1, 2. Satan is always discovering the weak spots in character and thrusting at them. He is keen as steel and cruel as hell. But we have One who pleads. As the priest Melchizedek, he ever lives to make intercession for us. "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan."

We are as brands scorched and charred with the burning. But we have been plucked out of the consuming flame. Surely then we are being kept for some high and useful purpose. All the past is an argument for faith. That God has done so much is a pledge that he will perfect that which concerneth us, because his mercy endureth for ever. It is not enough to be cleansed from sin, we need the miter of the divine anointing that we may have a place of access among the saints. Whom he justifies, he also glorifies. Let us be content with nothing short of God's best.

4. "Not by Might Nor by Power."

Zechariah 4:1-14. Zerubbabel had faltered in the great work of reconstruction and had practically lost heart. Here he is encouraged to renew his efforts and persevere to the top-stone. He might be weak and flexible as a wick but none of his deficiencies could hinder him from finishing his life-work, if only his spirit was kindled with the divine fire and fed by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

5. The Vision of the Flying Roll.

Zechariah 5:1-11. This huge sheet of parchment, 30 by 15 feet, was covered with the solemn curses of the Law, on one side against the thief and on the other against false-swearing. The young community was notorious for these two sins. They brought the dry-rot with them, v. 4. Their commercial life also, represented by the *ephah*, was full of wickedness. But it was to be eliminated. The swift stork wings would bear it away.

6. The Vision of the Chariots.

Zechariah 6:1-15. This is a vision of protection and deliverance. Four chariots issue from the mountains around Jerusalem. The colors of the horses represent the commission that the drivers were to execute against the nations. Black denoted defeat and despair; the bay acted as a patrol of defence. Note the closing incident, which foreshadowed the union of the offices of priesthood and kingship in the person of our Lord.

7. The Penalty of Injustice and Cruelty.

Zechariah 7:1-14. During their captivity the Jews observed four feasts. That of the 10th month recalled the first enclosure of Jerusalem by the enemies' lines; of the 4th the capture of the city; of the 5th the destruction by fire of the Temple; of the 7th the murder of Gedaliah. The national life was depressed by this constant memory of disaster. It seemed incongruous to act thus, when the Holy City was rising from the dust. Surely the lamentations which were befitting in Babylon, were out of place now. A deputation was therefore sent to inquire the views of the leaders. Zechariah gave four separate answers to the request. In vs. 4-7 he suggests that as these fasts had been set up by themselves, they were at liberty to discontinue them, and the main question was whether they were pondering the teachings and warnings of the older prophets. In vs. 8-14 he implored them not to yield to the obtuseness and disobedience of their fathers, in order that no second catastrophe should cast them back to the disasters they had suffered.

8. Truth and Love Must Prevail.

Zechariah 8:1-17. In his third answer Zechariah dilates on the prosperity awaiting the chosen city. The Lord had returned to dwell there, and the old men and women who were at the end of life should join with the happy boys and girls who were at the beginning in the enjoyment of the blessings of peace. Exiles also would

return to people the former desolations. But with these delightful forecasts ensue reiterated appeals.

9. The Nations Will Seek the God of Israel.

Zechariah 8:18-23; 9:1-8. In his final answer the prophet gives a delightful picture of the future, which was on the eve of complete realization. So entirely would the memory of the past be obliterated that fateful anniversaries would soon fade from their minds. Indeed they would discover that their dark days had been the source and origin of their glad ones. In all subsequent ages, even when persecuting the Jews, the foremost nations have taken hold of their skirts, appropriating their sacred writings, venerating their lawgivers, prophets, and saints; and believing in the noblest representative of their race.

The prophet passes his eye over the surrounding nations, showing that his people need fear no more, because their oppressors had been effectually silenced.

10. A Lowly Deliverer Brings Peace.

Zechariah 9:9-17; 10:1-12. Jesus must be King first, then Saviour. He is lowly; his steed is not the richly caparisoned warhorse, but the humble ass; he needs no weapon to overthrow his foes, because as Priest he speaks peace. The peasantry had taken shelter in the rockhewn mountain cisterns; but they might cherish hope, because they had been redeemed by the blood of the covenant, and God would see to it that that redemption was made effective. Before the advent of the King, the prison-doors would open, and at his word the imprisoned should go forth. How great are his goodness and beauty!

In 10:1-12 we have a reference to the successful stand made by Judas Maccabæus and his brethren against Antiochus. They were to tread them down as the mire of the streets; Joseph and Judah would be reunited and after their far-spread sowing over the world, the scat-

tered tribes would ultimately return as bees to the call of the bee-farmer.

11. Beauty and Bands.

Zechariah 11:1-17. The times were very dark when Zechariah felt called upon to act as shepherd to Jehovah's harried flock. Rulers and priests were actuated by selfish greed and mutual antagonism. Three shepherds had already failed. After a brief effort Zechariah renounced the attempt. He broke his staff of Beauty, or Grace, v. 10, R. V. margin, as if God's tender love had withdrawn from its struggle with evil; and when he challenged the people to set a value on his services, they weighed him out thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave. Thereupon he broke the other staff, disrupting the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. In the following paragraph, vs. 15-17, there is an evident reference to the terrible reign of Antiochus whose cruelties led to the heroic uprising of the Maccabees. Five centuries afterwards Jesus was sent to gather the flock with the same result, Matt. 27:9, 10.

12. Jerusalem's Day of Mourning.

Zechariah 12:1-14. This vision refers to a time yet future, when the Jews shall have returned to their own land, but still in unbelief; and will be assailed by their foes, though in vain, vs. 2, 3, 6. The Lord will defend them, vs. 7, 8. Then the nation will mourn. Their repentance will be *universal*, from the highest to the lowest; *lonely*, and *on account of the sufferings they inflicted on Jesus*. The Agent of this mourning will be the Holy Spirit; and it will eventuate in the full forgiveness of sin through the blood of atonement and an entire cleansing from idols.

13. A Day of Testing.

Zechariah 13:1-9; 14:1, 6-9. This Fountain was opened, when the soldier pierced the Saviour's side. But it is not enough for God to forgive; he must deal

drastically with the waywardness of his people. And so thorough would be the work, that parents would rather their son should die than assume for filthy lucre and without the divine call, the lucrative profession of a prophet. A township would arise against a man suspected of being a prophet, who, in his terror, would pretend that he was a tiller of the ground. And if they discovered marks in his body which indicated that he had been previously branded as a false prophet, he would rather assert that his friends had been the cause of his affliction, than that he had any sympathy with the prophetic office.

Note that remarkable anticipation, vs. 7-9. See Matt. 26:31. Jesus knew that he was the Father's *fellow*. He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him." But he is also *the Man*. By the grace of the One Man, we may reign in life, Rom. 5:17.

14. "At Evening Time It Shall Be Light."

Zechariah 14:1-21. We can hardly doubt that in chapter 14 Zechariah is anticipating the same events as Ezekiel describes in chapters 38 and 39 of his remarkable book. At first the attack of the enemies of God's people will be entirely successful, then Jesus will appear to them and for them. There will be a literal fulfillment of Acts 1:11 and Isa. 25:9, 10. It was when his brethren were in their greatest straits that Joseph made himself known to them, and when the Jews are in dire extremity, they will hear Him say, "I am Jesus your Brother." See Gen. 45:1-15. Finally the long stormy days of Israel's history will be over forever, and "at evening time it shall be light." It is clear that Paul's vision in Romans 11 is to be gloriously realized.

(For Review Questions see next page.)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON ZECHARIAH

OUTLINE.

- (a) What visions did Zechariah see and what did they concern?
- (b) What is the consummation of the prophecy?

INTRODUCTION.

- (c) To what period of Jewish history does this prophecy belong?
- (d) What other prophet was contemporary with Zechariah?
- (e) What contrast may be noted as to style in the writing of these prophets?
- (f) What is the main theme in the book of Zechariah?

SECTIONS 1—14. CHAPTERS 1—14.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

- 1. What warning does the prophet see in God's dealing with the former generation?
- 2. What promises of redemption and protection are given to Jerusalem?
- 3. What does God expect from those whom he purifies?
- 4. How was Zerubbabel encouraged to persevere? What work was he engaged in?
- 5. What sins were recorded upon the "flying roll"?
- 6. What two offices was the man whose name is "The Branch" to occupy? In whose person are these two offices united?
- 7. What questions were asked regarding the duty of fasting? What does the prophet imply is of more importance than the outward act?
- 8. Name some of the blessings which are to accompany Jerusalem's restoration?
- 9. What would ultimately become of the fasts about which the people had inquired?
- 10. What prophecy concerning Christ is found in this chapter? When was it fulfilled?

11. What price did Judas Iscariot receive for his betrayal of Christ? What reference is there in Zechariah 11: 13 to the way in which this "price of blood" was used by the priests?
12. In the day of their repentance, what will cause the Jews the greatest grief?
13. When did Jesus apply Zechariah 13: 7 to himself?
14. What promise of restoration is given to the Jews?

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

1. Sincerity of Worship Sought.

Malachi 1. The love referred to in these opening verses, 1-5, was exemplified in the divine choice, that through Israel the whole world might be blessed. Hate does not mean positive dislike but a forfeiture of the supreme place of privilege and ministry. Esau's sensuous nature preferred the mess of pottage to the birth-right, and this was characteristic of his people. In vs. 6-14 the prophet turns to the priests. They despised God's name and without scruple offered on his altar the lame, the blind, and the sick. They did not hesitate to speak of the routine of Levitical service as a weariness. Notice the pathetic appeal of v. 10, R.V., "Oh that there were one to shut the doors of my house, that ye might not offer vain sacrifices!" In contrast to this indifference, the truly marvelous outlook in v. 11 is very significant. Far away from Jewish altars, God's name was revered in Gentile lands, and sacrifices were offered which he accepted. The words remind us of Acts 10: 34, 35.

2. The Transgression of the Covenant.

Malachi 2. As a contrast to the disgraceful attitude which the prophet had described as characteristic of the priesthood, he paints the picture of the noble priest, whose burning zeal for God's honor averted evil and punishment from the people. It is desirable that each servant of God should seek to exemplify these traits of character, for it is only they who walk with God in peace and equity who can turn away "many from iniquity." The prophet reproves those who had put away their Jewish wives and had contracted marriage with foreigners. In doing this they had ignored the

fact that God was the Father of the Hebrew race, of the women as well as the men, in an especial sense in which he was not the Father of the heathen. In answer to the argument of the Jews, who demanded a plurality of wives, Malachi says that God originally made only one woman for one man, though he could have made many. It was a sin, therefore, against the original constitution of the race for a man to have more than one wife, and this is the argument that our Lord employed in Matthew 19:4. The one man for the one woman is the secret of a happy home-life and of a godly seed.

3. A Purging from Evil.

Malachi 3:1-12. The opening verses of this chapter stir the heart like the call of a trumpet. We remember how literally they were fulfilled in the presentation of our Lord in the Temple by his parents. Unnoticed by the crowds, jostled amid the press, borne in the arms of poverty, the King suddenly came to his Temple, even the Messenger of the Covenant. Only two faithful retainers, Simeon and Anna, were there to welcome him. But there is another and more personal reference. Let us keep the doors of our hearts wide open to the coming of the King. There may be no blare of trumpet, no flash of jewel, no cry of herald, but into your heart's secret shrine he will come. Is not this just what we need? Make haste, great Lord of all, and in our poor hearts do thy blessed work, that we may be refined as gold and silver, and offer to thee an offering in righteousness. Then will it be a delight to bring all the tithes into the storehouse.

4. Wickedness and Pride Shall Find Judgment.

Malachi 3:13—4:6. The day cometh! either in the fall of Jerusalem or in some terrible catastrophe yet future. Whenever it comes may we be reckoned as God's peculiar treasure, preserved as a woman preserves her jewels in the day of calamity, v. 17. Sorrow and disaster

are perpetually befalling the proud, or those that do wickedly; while on those who fear God's name the dawn of the sun of righteousness is forever breaking and growing to the perfect day. In the beams of the sun there are not only light and color, but rays which bear health and vitality to the world and to men; so in Jesus there is power to salvation. Notice how the Old Testament ends with the word *curse*, while Christ's proclamation opens with *Blessed*.

(*For Review Questions see next page.*)

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON MALACHI

OUTLINE.

- (a) What sins does the prophet rebuke?
- (b) To what great event does the prophecy look forward?

. INTRODUCTION.

- (c) What does the name "Malachi" mean?
- (d) What is the nature of this prophecy?
- (e) What is Malachi's position among the prophets?
How many years of silence were to elapse before
a new messenger should appear?

SECTIONS 1—4. CHAPTERS 1—4.

(Each question applies to the paragraph of corresponding number in the Comments.)

1. How did the Jews show contempt for God and his worship?
2. In what way had the priesthood especially transgressed?
3. What work would "the messenger of the covenant" perform?
4. What precious promise is for them who fear the Lord and think upon his name?

